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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



["HELEN, I KNOW EVERYTHING!" SAID LORD BERTRAM. "CAN YOU EVER FORGIVE MY UNWARRANTABLE BEHAVIOUR?"]

HIS GREAT BLUNDER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

It was far away from England in a spot which two years before had been almost unknown to the civilized world, but which was now the goal of all needy fortune-hunters; since the first nugget of gold had been discovered, the stream of pilgrims to this new Eldorado had never ceased.

A long array of canvas huts, a few wooden shanties, formed the new township, or, as its inhabitants mostly called it, the Camp.

It was three days journey by post-cart from the nearest railway station to Neufontein, it was farther still from a seaport, and yet the wonderful rush of new arrivals never failed. Old and young, English and foreign, learned and ignorant, the supply never languished.

It included all classes, from the ne'er-do-well who had never earned an honest penny in his

life, to the steady tradesman who having been bitten by the gold fever, sold up his modest business and made tracks for the land of fortune.

There were few women there. The life was too rough for the wives and daughters of the better-class adventurers, and the lower stratum belonged to that wandering race who are not apt to give hostages to fortune.

No, the masculine gender predominated greatly in that strange, mixed community. Women were rare creatures there, and yet women had been the cause of the coming of many a one of those fortune-hunters; many of the gold-seekers coveted success chiefly for the sake of some loved one at home. Many another had come madly to Neufontein to forget a face, all too dear, that, alas! was not for him.

In one of the better huts—for the canvas homes had their gradations just as much as the houses in a London suburb—two men were busy talking.

They were the subject of much speculation among their companions. Not only because of the wonderful "look" which attended their

every step, or the deep, faithful attachment between them, but because of their evident superiority to most of those around them, and the strange silence they maintained about their past.

Even their names had not penetrated to the digger-settlement, who had rechristened them in homely fashion "Curly" and "Gentleman Jack."

It would have surprised their comrades very much if they had learned the truth.

John Fraser and "Curly" had never set eyes on each other until they met on the voyage out, and were drawn together perhaps from the fact that they were the only two of the steerage passengers who would have been more at home on the quarter deck, and yet more because, with eyes sharpened by his own experience, each could see that the other carried a secret trouble.

And when one night the cry sounded "Man overboard!" it was John Fraser who plunged to the rescue and dragged back "Curly" from the jaws of death.

Gentleman Jack always felt that that fall over the side might not have been accidental,

but that it was the search of a despairing spirit after death.

He never put the feeling into words. He expected and received no rapturous gratitude from the rescued man; but from that hour the two were friends.

For eighteen months now they had laboured side by side, and they had now a fortune which would have kept them both in ease, yet still they plodded on, careful and frugal in their habits, never launching out like the other diggers in brandy and coarse amusements.

The two toiled on as though they had not a penny in the world, yet they were ever ready to lend a helping hand to those around them, and showed no miserly love of money.

One man declared once they worked so hard because they liked it. He did not guess the truth; they worked because toil was the only thing that kept them from despair.

And through all those eighteen months of close intimacy, they had never spoken of the past. Now and again they would buy, at ruinous prices too, the reversion of an English newspaper, sent to some neighbour fortunate enough to have friends at home, and then they would sit up half the night discussing English politics or the topics of the day "at home;" but of their own relations or friends they never spoke at all. Neither asked a single question, the past as concerned themselves was a sealed book.

And now this was to be altered. It had been a scorching hot day in the middle of the African summer, and for the first time "Curly" had given way, "knocked under" he called it, and Gentleman Jack had insisted on fetching the somewhat broken-down surgeon who "doctored" the Camp.

Mr. Macalp had not come to Neufontein in search of gold in the sense of digging for it; but he wanted to earn it by curing the ailments of those who had.

He had been so unfortunate as to administer poison in mistake for a restorative to one of his patients, and only escaped with his life when it was found he was dead drunk at the time.

However, all his practice fell off, as no one would not risk being his second victim, and having a wife and several children he thought it better to come farther afield, judging that in a wild place like Neufontein people would not be very particular as to his antecedents. To do him justice, he was a clever fellow and a kind-hearted one.

His one bane was drink; and people soon discovering this, and having a great respect for their own lives, it became a sort of rough law that no one should offer the "Doctor" any liquor.

Even the canteen-keepers, having also their lives to think of, gave in to this, and Mr. Macalp was perforce kept tolerably sober from his inability to procure strong drink.

He came and looked at "Curly," asked a few questions, mixed some "stuff" from the small black bag which formed his medicine chest, and departed with a look at John Fraser, inviting him to follow.

Canvas huts were too primitive to speak secrets in, and Mr. Macalp had an idea that what he was going to say ought to be kept from his patient at any cost.

"Well," asked Fraser, "what is it?" They were out on the veldt now, no one within sight or earshot.

"You'll never save him," was the Scotchman's blunt rejoinder, "the fever's coming on, and he's no strength to fight against it!"

"He has never ailed anything since he came out," retorted Fraser, as angrily as though Mr. Macalp had insulted his friend, "and he has led a temperate life."

"A man has other foes besides the brandy bottle," said the doctor, who fancied the last remark was intended as a put at him, "and she lad's no stamina. If you want my opinion, he's just been fretting his heart out, and his worn away every bit of strength he had!"

Back to the hut went John Fraser, trying

hard to believe Macalp was mistaken, and full of a wild resolve to start with Curly the next morning for Kimberley no matter what loss their sudden departure entailed; but this plan was never to be carried out.

There was something in Curly's face when he looked at him, something in the glitter of the eyes, the dry, burning heat of the skin, which told him it was too late—the fever had come.

"What did he want?" asked Curly, and the lad's voice had a musical ring in it just like a woman's. "What made the old fellow so mysterious?"

"He is afraid you are in for camp fever," returned Fraser, who was incapable of falsehood.

"I could have told him that. Look here, Jack, by to-morrow I may be delirious, and there are one or two things I must say to you in case I—"

"Don't," said Fraser, huskily. "I can't stand it, lad. Don't talk of dying."

"It won't bring it any nearer, and—I'd rather feel I'd told you."

They had not kept their gains at Neufontein. Once in a while they had always looked up the canvas hut and deserted the claim, going down to Kimberley to invest their treasure in the safe keeping of the bank.

They were almost the only ones among the gold-seekers who had taken this precaution; but then, as Macalp said grudgingly, no one else had their luck.

Only a week ago they had both been on one of their expeditions. What would not Fraser have given now had they only remained within reach of civilization a little longer?

"You must have your way," said Gentleman Jack, sadly, "only Macalp's not infallible, and—"

"And many people recover from camp fever," put in Curly; "but I shan't, old fellow. When a man has no wish to live he doesn't have the energy to pull through. You saved my life once, Jack, but you won't do it a second time. You have been very good and patient, old chum, not asking a single question; but before I'm very ill I'd rather tell you all."

"Don't pain yourself with a long story, lad," said Fraser, simply, "I can guess the main fact. You came out here for a woman's sake, one who had jilted or tricked you, or—" his voice grew almost reverent—"one whom you had lost by death."

"No," the boy's voice was clear and distinct. "She is alive—a beautiful, peerless Nell. I was never good enough for her; only, you see, I thought she loved me, and I—I worshipped her with every fibre of my heart."

"And she cast you aside like a cast-off glove!" said Fraser, bitterly. "Just like her. All women are false."

It was a simple story, such as happens every day; only Charles Bonverie had a tender, sensitive nature, and he had never rallied from the blow of finding his divinity only brass instead of fine gold.

Another man it might have sent to the dogs, a third it might have turned into a hard cynical woman-hater.

Curly it had driven from home and friends to seek forgetfulness in exile. He had been left an orphan, and his godfather, Sir Charles Seaton, not only paid for his education but obtained him a post in a first-rate bank, where, though only twenty-two, young Bonverie was earning a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

He was popular everywhere—he liked his work. A happy useful life seemed stretched out before him till, in an evil hour, he accepted an invitation to Seaton Hall for his summer holiday.

There he met Sir Charles's niece—beautiful, brilliant Nell Seaton; and she, a coquette to her finger tips, did not scruple to add another to her victims.

Gently as Curly spoke of her, Jack could read "between the lines." He knew that the siren had led the young clerk on by every

means in her power, and then rejected him, not quietly or regretfully, but with open disdain.

"She said she was not made for love in a cottage," groaned poor Curly, "that her face was her fortune, and she must dispose of it to the best advantage."

"In fine, sell herself to the highest bidder."

"Look here, old man," said Curly, simply, "you mustn't speak against her, or I shall be afraid to ask you my last favour. When I am dead and you go home to England—don't go purposely, but I seem to feel you won't stay here alone—I want you to find out Nell. She lives with her uncle most of the year at Seaton Hall. I want you to tell her I forgave her, and I was sorry."

"Sorry!"

"I said some cruel things to her when we parted. I'm not sure but that I cursed her. You'll take my message, Jack? I want her to know that I forgave her, and that I regretted that last interview with all my heart."

"All right!"

Curly needed no promise. He was quite content with that short consent. He went on to speak of Nell and her beauty, her grace and accomplishments.

"After all," he said, gravely, "perhaps she was right. She was not fitted for poverty, poor little thing, and a bank clerk had little else to offer her."

"Did Sir Charles know?"

"No; she begged me not to tell him. He was a very strict, honorable man, and rather hard on Nell, though he loved her dearly."

Mr. Macalp came again that night and returned early in the morning. He spoke cheerfully enough to Curly, it being his habit to persuade his patients as long as possible that they were getting well, but the look he gave Jack told the poor friend pretty well that the invalid was worse.

"He'll not see sunset," was the Scotchman's verdict, and when he looked on the haggard, fever-burnt face, Jack felt the "doctor" might be right.

"What is the day of the month?" asked Curly, suddenly.

"The tenth of February."

"Ah! my birthday, and I am twenty-four. I've always had a fancy I should not live two years after I left Nell, and it will be two years in June."

Jack Fraser held the burning hand in his wish almost a woman's tenderness, and he listened to the dying charge with his eyes not quite dry.

"I made my will last time we were in Kimberley," went on Curly. "They've got it at the bank, and I've left everything to you. Jack, you'll be a rich man with the double share. Can't you go home? I've never asked the question, but I know your heart longs for England."

"Ay," said the other, roughly, "but it's little cause to. My own father suspected me of forgery, Curly. My mother and sisters believed it, too. They wouldn't prosecute 'for the sake of the family honour,' but I was never to show my face at home."

"It was terribly hard," admitted Curly, "but then you know it wasn't true."

"I knew that, but I couldn't betray my brother—the heir and the light of my father's eyes. There was no public exposure, you know. The lad is a proud man. Everything was hushed up, only my allowance was stopped, and I had a hint to make myself scarce at home, so I sent in my papers. I was in one of the finest regiments in England, and I came out here, and before I came out, Curly, I vowed I'd never seek to be reconciled to my home people until they found out their mistake."

"Won't your brother confess and set you right with the world?"

"He says it would be my father's death-blow, and his own ruin. Perhaps he's right. It must be more degrading to be punished for a crime you have committed than for one

"you're innocent of. I've always been able to hold up my head and feel there was no black cross against my name in Heaven. But then you've believed in me, Carly, and that's something for me to remember."

"And some day the truth will out," answered Carly. "Jack, if this cloud is lifted and you go home and take my message to Nell—"

"I shall take your message in any case; there's no need for me to set foot in my father's country, and England is broad enough for him and me."

"If you meet Nell, and learn to care for her, don't let any thought of me come between you. She is so beautiful you are sure to admire her; and, you see, she was very young, and she could not tell I should take it so much to heart."

"My dear lad, I would not marry Nell Seaton if there was not another woman in the world."

And at sundown, just as Mr. Macalp had foretold, Charles Bouverie died. Next day they buried him in the rough piece of veldt which was all Neufontein had for God's acre; and though Gentleman Jack was chief mourner, quite fifty of the diggers followed the rough-made coffin, and listened while a word of prayer was said, as all that remained of the dead lad was left to its last rest.

"If ever I see that woman I will tell her what I think of her pretty plainly," muttered Jack, between his clenched teeth. "She shall have my chum's message; but she shall know all the same that she killed him, just as surely as though she put a bullet through his heart."

CHAPTER II.

It was the London season. The month when the fashionable world is at its gayest. With the first days of June, the upper ten thousand were in all the zenith of their amusements. The contest which manœuvring mothers waged year after year had fairly begun; but, as yet, there was no hint of its result. In the month of June, a freshness yet lingers over the green verdure in the parks, and over the fair faces of debutantes; six weeks later the trees will be faded and dusty with the summer heat, and the girls—some of them—weariness with the delights that seem now so keen and lasting.

There had been an afternoon reception at Lady Seaton's mansion near Hyde Park; for three mortal hours guests had come and gone, and now the grand drawing-rooms were nearly empty, and only a few intimates lingered to discuss with their hostess past pleasures and future engagements.

Lady Seaton was a very pretty woman, many years younger than her husband; she had only been married twelve months, and was very much in love with the generous baronet who had given her home, title and wealth. Her age might have been thirty-five, though she looked younger. She was one of the most popular women in London, and her husband's young niece, Helen, fairly worshipped her.

"Yes," she was saying in reply to some question, "in another month we shall go home. I don't think any of us are very inveterate pleasure-seekers. Sir Charles is always happiest in the country, and Helen declares there is no place like Seaton Hall."

"I wonder Miss Seaton does not marry," said Lady Gadsby, who was rather fond of expressing her opinion too frankly. "She is such a pretty girl, and she has been 'out' three seasons."

Lady Seaton smiled, she really could not help it.

"I don't think Helen is easily pleased," she said, simply, "and we are only too glad to keep her with us."

"But at your age, dear Lady Seaton, a grown-up niece must be quite an incumbrance!"

"I have never found her so," was the prompt rejoinder. "Helen and I are great friends; she has enough money of her own to make her independent, and so it she likes to remain single, there is no reason against it."

"Ah!" Lady Gadsby had sense enough to see she had better change the subject. "Of course, you have heard all about the Rutherfords, Lady Seaton? Everyone is talking about it. Such a romantic story."

"I know that the Viscount died a few months ago, and that Lord and Lady Rutherford have been seeking their younger son ever since. I suppose it is rather singular now-a-days when the heir to an earldom has to be hunted for; but perhaps the young man was of a roving turn of mind?"

"He was nothing of the kind," put in another lady, Mrs. Mannering, rather snappishly. "John Bertram was one of the finest fellows going, but somehow, his parents never did him justice; they were so wrapped up in the heir they had no affection left for their second son. Finally, there was a dreadful quarrel; I never heard the particulars, but I expect some of the Viscount's transgressions were laid to Jack's door, and he was too proud to defend himself. Anyway, he went abroad and nothing has been heard of him since."

"Oh, but there has," struck in Lady Gadsby, who had been eagerly seeking an opening. "I went to call on Lady Rutherford yesterday—she only sees old friends just now, but she never refuses me—and she told me that Lord Bertram had returned to England, and that they hoped he would soon join them in Park-lane."

"He won't!" said Mrs. Mannering decisively. "He's not the kind of man to forget all that went before. John Bertram will be a dutiful son and live on friendly terms with his family, but he won't take up his abode in Park-lane, and become a kind of gentleman usher to those ridiculous affected girls. He's not the sort of man."

There were six daughters, six ladies Bertram who as yet seemed in no hurry to change their name. Lord Rutherford had sacrificed all his other children to his eldest son. For years the family lived quietly from January to December in their north-country home, that the Viscount might have ample means for his extravagant pleasures. Then when the youngest girl was twenty, her daughters' husbandless condition troubled the Countess, and they began an annual trip to London for the season; but nothing came of it. Whether the prospects of five spinster sisters-in-law was too much for marriageable men, or whether they did not relish the prospect of being connected with such a prodigal as Lord Bertram, no one can say; but the fact remained, no one came forward.

And now Ronald Bertram with all his sins and follies was dead, and his parents had the veil rudely torn from their eyes, and saw him as he was. They knew now they had sacrificed Jack to his elder brother, and that their second son had been loyal and true.

"He will never forgive us," said Lord Rutherford, a white haired man of nearly seventy to his wife. "We blighted the lad's whole prospects, Mary; we condemned him unjustly; and now, for aught we know, Jack may be dead, and Rutherford pass to a distant coast."

"I don't think he's dead," said the mother, slowly, "something would have told us if it was so; but oh! we have ruined his life, and even now what can we offer him. The estate is mortgaged to the hilt, and you will have much ado to make John an allowance worthy of his heir."

It was perfectly true. The estate had been mortgaged to pay the debts of the dead heir. When the interest was paid only a very moderate income remained to Lord Rutherford and his family. Fortunately, his wife's portion had been settled on herself to go at her death to her younger children; but for that it would have been a sorry prospect for the six girls.

Circumstances had delayed Gentleman Jack's return to England. He would gladly have sailed by the next steamer after his friend's death, and he hurried down to Kimberley, intending to catch the mail train, but before it started he was attacked by the same fever which had carried off poor Carly.

It formed no part of Jack's scheme to go home an invalid, and so he stayed a good two months in Cape Town until he had recovered in health. He was not idle during this time. He "proved" Charles Bouverie's will, and forwarded the large fortune made by their joint efforts—now, alas! entirely his—to England. He was almost astonished at its amount.

The Cape Town lawyer he employed recommended the money being placed to Jack's credit in the London branch of the chief bank of the colony.

There it could safely await its owner's return even if that were deferred. He gave the sum total as sixty thousand pounds, and assured Mr. Fraser he was a "lucky fellow."

Jack, who had kept back an odd thousand for temporary expenses, seemed half amused at the words. "Lucky," was certainly the best adjective he would have applied to himself; but he did not tell Mr. Campbell this.

He thanked him for his courtesy, and went on board a homeward-bound steamer, the first week in May, feeling about as lonely and disconsolate as any man could.

He had not the least intention of announcing his return to his family. As he had told poor Carly, England was large enough for him and them.

He went straight to a private hotel, not far from Charing Cross, and signed the visitors' book in his full name, John Fraser Bertram.

He went out early the next day. He was bound for the bank, and then intended to call upon a solicitor, to whom Mr. Campbell had recommended him, the latter's English agent, in fact, for Jack had not the least intention of trusting his business to the family lawyer of the Rutherfords.

But a surprise awaited him. Mr. Tindal no sooner heard his full name than he guessed the truth.

"I will undertake the management of your affairs willingly; but I ought to tell you of the changes time has made. Your brother is dead, and your father has been seeking you for months. A reward has been offered for your address."

Jack smiled grimly.

"Well, Mr. Tindal, my present address is the Royal Hotel, Norfolk-street, if any of your clerks like to earn the reward."

"You don't mean that you intend not to go to your parents?"

"I took a solemn oath when I left England not to seek them out. The first overtures must come from them."

"The Earl is getting an old man," said the lawyer, thoughtfully, "and you are his only son; don't you think—"

Jack interrupted him.

"I will do my utmost to meet my father's wishes on all points; but I will not sue to him for a reconciliation. He ordered me out of his house once. I swore then I would never enter it again without an express invitation. Besides," and he drew himself up proudly, "the Earl might think I coveted the temporal things that were poor Bertram's, and wanted him to make me an allowance suited to his heir."

"You are a richer man than Lord Rutherford," replied the lawyer, "even if you only get five per cent. for your money. What with paying the interest on the mortgage and keeping up the property, I should doubt if the Earl had two thousand a year he could call his own."

"And my sisters?"

Mr. Tindal smiled.

"There are no additions to your family, Lord Bertram in the shape of brothers-in-law. The young ladies do not seem in a hurry to find husbands."

"Well," and Jack shook hands warmly with the kind-hearted lawyer. "If you like to tell Perkins—I suppose he's still my father's solicitor—you've seen me, you can; but remember, I have not come home like a prodigal son to be feted and made much of. If I hadn't lost the only creature I cared for, I should be in Africa now."

Mr. Tindal noticed the mourning band on Jack's hat.

"I beg your pardon," he said, gravely. "I had no idea of your marriage or of your wife's death."

"I have not been married. I don't believe enough in women to trust my happiness to one. I have lost a friend, that's all. We two were both outcasts from England, and we believed in each other. I'd give every shilling of my fortune—I'd give my own right hand—if I could bring him back again; but you see it's no use, and so I came home."

Mr. Tindal did a very unprofessional thing when his new client had departed. He did not seek the intervention of Mr. Perkins, the family lawyer, as strict etiquette demanded, but he sat down and wrote a brief note to Lord Rutherford, telling him his son had returned to England, and was staying at the Royal Hotel.

"I have just parted from Lord Bertram," concluded the letter, "and I fear he has not the slightest intention of making overtures to his family. He says he took an oath, my lord, never to enter your house again uninvited; and from what I have seen of him, I should say he was one to keep his word."

This note was sent by special messenger, and reached Lord Rutherford just as he was retiring to his study after lunch. He sent for his wife, and put it into her hands.

"Heaven has been very good to us, Mary."

"Oh, my dear," said the old lady tearfully, "this is great news, but I hope poor John hasn't grown reckless and disappointed. If he has come back ever so poor, you know, it will be our fault. You won't reproach him, Oscar, if he seems changed for the worse."

"No, Mary, no! You see Mr. Tindal gives not the least hint as to John's circumstances, or what occasioned his return to England. I shall go to see him at once this very afternoon."

"I never heard of the Royal Hotel."

"Nor I. It may be some very second-rate place because the poor fellow can't afford better. I shall bring him home at once, Mary. We can do some shopping on the way if he's very shabby, and, my dear, you will speak to the girls and see they receive him properly."

Poor old lady. She did not like the task. The six sisters had been far more bitter against John than his parents, and they had all opposed his recall. Their opinion was that if he had not committed forgery he had certainly become a vagabond, and a ne'er-do-well, and he would be no acquisition to the family but only an expense. Poor as their father was now, it would be far better to leave Jack to shift for himself, since the income was all too small for their requirements now, and would be a harder squeeze than ever when an allowance had to be subtracted for the heir.

But Mary, Countess Rutherford, was not the woman to shirk a duty, and though she would far rather have gone with her husband to the Royal Hotel, she went to face the girls as soon as the Earl had started.

They were still in deep mourning for their elder brother; and if Rutherford Court had not been let to a wealthy stockbroker, the chances are the family would not have come to London at all this season.

Six grown-up daughters do not add to the harmony of a family. One, or even two, of these blessings are invaluable, but when it comes to six! Six full-grown women can hardly live in perfect union, at least two or three of them have begun to think it time they had a home of their own, and in the case of the ladies Bertram two were older than Jack, and consequently well on in the thirties, while the

youngest of the remaining four had passed her twenty-first birthday.

"My dears, I have great news for you."

Six pairs of eyes were turned on the Countess, and Lady Matilda, the eldest daughter, said sharply,—

"Have you heard of John?"

"He is in England. Your father has gone to see him and bring him home."

"Very foolish," said Gertrude. "I dare say he has gone half-way to the bad, and it will only be poor Bertram's case over again."

"In my father's circumstances it is unjust to us," said Sophy, tartly. "Who will come to the house if it is known we have a returned prodigal here?"

"He will be just like a savage," pouted Lydia, after being in uncivilized places so long.

Only one of the girls had a kind word for the absent brother.

"I'm very glad," said Molly, simply. "I always felt poor old Jack was hardly dealt by. You need not frighten yourselves, girls. John would be a gentleman if he had spent ten years on a desert island, and, after all, he's not been gone two yet."

Lord Rutherford was immensely relieved at the appearance of the Royal Hotel. Evidently no cheap hostel, but a thoroughly respectable, superior family abode.

There was something reassuring even in the aspect of the servant who answered his inquiries.

"Is Mr. Bertram staying here," for the father decided Jack would not have assumed his title.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Bertram is not in now, but we expect him back shortly."

"I will wait," said Lord Rutherford, quietly. "You can tell him his father wishes to see him."

"Certainly, sir. You will like to take a seat in Mr. Bertram's private room?"

Lord Rutherford was shown to a pleasant room, whose open window faced the Thames embankment. Decidedly if John had returned penniless he must be of a reckless turn of mind, for the Earl had some experience of hotels, and knew what such accommodation would cost.

A smell of tobacco impregnated the air. Some books and papers littered the table. Evidently Mr. Bertram made himself very much at home.

The time seemed long to the father. It was three when he reached the hotel, and the chiming of St. Clement Dane's had sounded five before a quick step was heard on the stairs. The door was pushed abruptly open, and Lord Rutherford beheld his absent son.

But how altered! Could it really be less than two years since Jack had been a gay, handsome young officer.

John Fraser Bertram was handsome still, but he looked ten years older than the soldier son the Earl had dismissed in anger. Foreign suns had bronzed his skin, and the fever had wasted his strength and made him much thinner than of yore.

A tall, grave-looking man, with the traces of sorrow and suffering on his face, there was nothing of the prodigal about him.

The words Lord Rutherford had intended to speak faded on his lips, and he could only say, sadly,—

"Can you ever forgive us, John? I fear we have spoiled your life amongst us."

"You might have trusted me," said the returned wanderer, slowly; but that was the only reproach he uttered.

His father's bowed form and silvered hair told him a little of what the Earl had suffered, and touched his heart. In a very different tone he added,—

"I am very glad to see you, father, it is good of you to come."

"You have heard of your brother's death. Jack? Till I listened to his dying confession—"

Jack stopped him.

"Don't let's speak of that, father. I knew

all along I could clear myself by exposing Bertram, but he said it would break your heart."

"You knew the truth all along, and kept silent?"

"Well, you see, I have a little regard for the family name, too. Bertram said if the truth was published he should go headlong to ruin, and I thought perhaps it was easier for you to bear to see a younger son disgraced than the heir of the Rutherfords."

"And you had no idea of Bertram's death when you came home?"

"Not in the least. I promised a friend of mine on his death-bed to come to England, and take a message from him to—to one he loved. That promise, and that alone brought me home."

"And you did not mean to come to us?"

Jack shook his head.

"I fear I am as proud as you are, sir. I thought England was wide enough for us both. I should never have come to you unless you asked me."

"But I ask it now. You are Lord Bertram, Jack, and my heir. I'm afraid I can't do much for you, my boy, for your brother's debts have crippled me; but you must come home to us, and I'll make you the best allowance I can spare. I suppose it's too late for you to go back to your profession?"

"Yes. Even if other things permitted, I am too old. I should seem like an old fogey to the young officers. I am more like a man of fifty than one of thirty-two."

Lord Rutherford felt troubled.

"But you will come home?" he urged.

"You won't go back to those outlandish parts again?"

"I meant to stay in England for a year or two," said Jack, gravely. "I am tired of wandering. I thought I would settle down for a while, and perhaps write my travels. I was always fond of scribbling, and a man wants some occupation."

"A very good idea," said the Earl, warmly.

"If you made a little money by your pen, Jack, it would be a help. I fear I shan't be able to screw out more than five hundred a-year for you; but I'll talk to Perkins, and do my best."

"My dear father," said Jack, quickly, "I can't take a penny of your money. If all I hear is true, you can't have too much left for yourself."

"But, my boy, there's your position to keep up. You must have pocket money and so on. England's not like the desert."

"I have plenty of my own. I forgot you didn't know. I went to the gold-fields, and made what they call out there 'a tidy pile.' My poor chum left me all his, too."

"But you ought to invest the money, not live on it," said the Earl, who put the sum down in his mind as two or three thousands.

"I'm going to invest it. Tindal says he can get me five per cent. quite safely."

As the Earl had to pay ten per cent. on the mortgage just raised on his property he quite believed this.

"And you think you could live on that?" he said, dubiously.

"Oh, yes. I shall keep out enough to furnish a set of chambers near Piccadilly and invest the rest. It'll be about sixty thousand pounds."

"Sixty thousand pounds! I hope no one has deceived you, my boy. Shares are treacherous things."

"But my money is in an English bank, safe and sound. You see, sir, I shan't need to be a burden on you."

"But you'll come home?"

"I'll come and see my mother gladly. When you're at the Court I shall be delighted to run down for a few weeks; but I'm afraid I'm too old now to 'live' with you. I want a place of my own, where I can be as silent as I please. Eighteen months in a camp doesn't make a fellow fit for constant society."

"But—"

"I shall take chambers," went on Jack,

"and then I shall feel I have a place I can call my own. I daresay you will see a great deal of me, sir; but I'd rather keep my independence."

The Earl sighed.

"I hope you haven't lost your heart to a coloured woman, Jack. I've no right to interfere after the way I've treated you; but I think if you married a savage it would break my heart."

Jack laughed with the utmost amusement. The Earl's grief was so comic.

"Be easy, father, he said, quietly, when he had recovered his gravity. "I have lost my heart to nobody, coloured or white. I don't think I saw a lady the whole time I lived in Camp, and I'm not the sort of fellow to marry anyone but a lady."

Lord Rutherford groaned.

"There was the voyage home," he said, suspiciously; "lots of marriages are made up on board ship."

"There were some delightful girls on board," admitted Jack; "but I didn't succumb to their fascinations. The truth is, father," he added, more gravely, "while that cloud hung over me I should never have felt free to offer my hand to any woman. I called myself John Fraser in Africa, but I couldn't have married a wife in a name that was not my own."

The Earl drew a breath of relief.

"I'm very glad to hear it; but, Jack, you're the last of the direct line, and you owe it to your family to marry; besides, think of your mother. She has seen her eight sons and daughters grow up, and there's not a grandchild belonging to her. You really must think of finding a wife."

Jack smiled.

"I fancy we are not a marrying family. I will confess this much, I never saw a woman I should care to make my wife."

"You must go into society," cried the Earl. "We are keeping quiet this season because of your brother's death; but there are one or two charming girls about. I know that much."

Jack shook his head.

"I don't care for beauties."

"Well, you may change your mind when you see them. Do you remember Nelly Harcourt?"

"Our old Rector's daughter? Perfectly, but Miss Harcourt must be two or three years older than me, and—"

"I don't want you to marry her," said the Earl, rather irritably, "in fact you can't if you wanted to ever so, for she made a very grand match last year. Her husband is Sir Charles Seaton. He's awfully rich, and Nelly hadn't a penny; but I must say she was as romantically in love with him as though she had been a girl in her teens. No, Jack, you can't marry Nelly Harcourt; but her husband's niece, Helen Seaton, is one of the most beautiful girls in London. Birth, fortune, and good looks, she has them all, and you couldn't do better than make her Lady Bertram."

A mist seemed to come before Jack's eyes, the hotel parlour faded, and he was back at Neufontein in the canvas hut listening to Charles Bouverie's story of the woman who had wrecked his life.

He had promised "Carly" to carry his forgiveness to Nell Seaton. He had assured his dead friend he would not marry Nell if there were not another woman in England; and now, in the first hour of his return, his father recommended her to him as a wife.

He meant to see her, to know her intimately, and then to taunt her with her cruelty to "Carly," to tell her plainly she was the poor boy's murderer.

He had wondered how he should find her out. If Sir Charles Seaton lived in the country all the year, how was he to get an introduction to the baronet, and an invitation to visit at the Hall; and now, without any seeking of his own he could at once become intimate with the family, since he and Lady Seaton had been boy and girl together.

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH Lady Seaton had spoken so calmly of the Rutherford romance when the subject was started in her own drawing-room, she was not without a great interest in the family she had known from infancy. She would not betray her old acquaintance with them to such an arrant gossip as Lady Gadsby, but she could remember the Rutherfords as long as she could remember anyone.

Twenty years ago she had shared the lessons given by a French governess to the two eldest girls; and when her father's death obliged her to go out into the world and earn her own bread, it was the warm recommendation of Lady Rutherford which gained her her first situation. The Earl and Countess had never lost sight of her. Many a vacation had she spent with them, and she felt a warm regard and sincere gratitude for both.

"What's the matter, aunty?" cried a bright voice, breaking in upon her reminiscences. "You look as if you had picked up sixpence and lost half-a-crown."

The speaker was Helen Seaton, the girl whom Lady Gadsby declared "ought to marry," and whom the new Lord Bertram hated already as his friend's destroyer.

She did not look a creature to inspire hatred on this summer day. Sir Charles's niece was twenty-two, and beautiful enough to take hearts by storm, and yet no one taken unawares could have said, if asked suddenly, in what her charm consisted.

Helen was tall and slender, quite a head taller than her new aunt. Her features were not quite regular, but that fault was forgotten in their beauty of colouring and expression. The bloom on the cheeks was the faintest pink, her complexion was as fair as a lily, but her hair was dark—soft, silky, brown hair, looking in some lights almost black—and her eyes were those lovely grey eyes which look dark blue in their depths, the real blue-grey tint which almost always speaks of Irish descent; and, in Helen's case, the eyes told a true story, for her mother had been an Irish beauty, and—rare thing for a daughter of Erin—heiress.

Helen had the ready wit, the quick, passionate nature, the wonderful mixture of pathos and high spirits which are the Celtic gifts. She bent over Lady Seaton fondly, and said, reproachfully,—

"I do believe you have been crying!"

"I was thinking of old times, dear, and old friends. Lady Gadsby told me news of the Rutherfords."

Helen shrugged her shoulders.

"That unfortunate young man has turned up she says. I really think if I had known his address I'd have sent him a post-card advising him to stay in Africa."

"My dear girl, why?"

"Because his six sisters will make his life a weariness to him. Fancy being at the beck and call of the six ladies Bertram; why, Mary is the only one of the lot who has any heart or brains."

"The others had both once," said Lady Seaton, trying to defend her friends; "but—"

"They are old maids, and they haven't the courage to accept the position. Do you know, Aunt Nell, the Bertrams are a warning to me? If I thought there was the least chance of my growing like them, I really think," musingly, "I should marry the very next man who proposed to me."

"You will never be like the Bertrams," said Lady Seaton, affectionately, "and I love to have you with us; but, Helen, don't you think, sometimes, you may be planning a very lonely future for yourself?"

"I prefer loneliness to disagreeable company," said Miss Seaton, gravely. "If you wish to turn matchmaker, aunt, well, there's my pretty cousin, Fenella, who will be very grateful for your good offices. I really think she dreads nothing so much in the world as being an old maid."

Lady Seaton smiled, she was not very fond

of Fenella, who, truth to say, was in Sir Charles's black books just at present.

"She is coming to us as soon as we go back to the Hall. You were brought up together Helen, so I suppose you will be glad to see her again."

"I shall be delighted—for a whole hour; after that, Aunt Nell, Fenella will have her never failing effect on me, which means, supposing I am a pussy cat, she will never cease to rub me the wrong way."

"Your uncle is vexed that she jilted Captain Hayland. Jilt sounds a harsh term, but really she deserves it."

"The Captain had a lucky escape," said Helen, "if he would only think so. Fenella hasn't a penny of her own, and she would be miserable as the wife of an officer with nothing but his pay."

"Then why did she accept him?"

"I suppose she thought he had private means. Don't let's talk about it, aunt Nell, it makes me so cross."

A week passed. The news spread like wildfire that Lord Bertram had returned; and although the family were still in mourning and did not accept invitations, everyone flocked to congratulate the Earl and Countess, and it was generally assumed the new viscount would not be too out up at his brother's death to mingle in society.

Among the rest of Lady Rutherford's callers were Helen Seaton and her aunt. These two were more favoured than the general public, for Jack happened to be in Park-lane, and for once did not cry off appearing in his mother's drawing-room. Was it a kindly interest in his old playmate which took him there, or a desire to see the girl for whom he had received a death-bed message?

Very simply he greeted Lady Seaton, and congratulated her on her marriage. Then, his sisters being out, it fell to his lot to entertain Helen while his mother talked to her old friend.

One glance at Helen's face and Jack confessed Charles Bouverie was right. She was, indeed, a lovely creature, and, but for that confidence in the canvas hut at Neufontein, he would have thought a good one. Helen's manner was so frank and unaffected. There was not a trace of coquetry about her. She seemed to treat him like an old friend.

"Bah!" muttered Jack to himself, when he thought over the interview afterwards, "the height of art is to conceal art. I daresay she was laughing at me in her sleeve. I suppose she talked to poor Carly like that till she had charmed his heart away, and then told him it was only 'friendship.' Quiet flirts are the worst of all."

But he talked to Helen with every appearance of interest, and before the ladies had left he had promised to come and dine with them at an early date and make the acquaintance of Sir Charles.

"Is she not charming?" asked his mother, when the guests had left.

"Nelly Harcourt was always charming. I am glad her poverty-stricken days are over."

"I mean Miss Seaton."

"She is beautiful," said Jack, coldly, "but heartless, I should imagine."

"No one has found her heart yet, at any rate," said his mother, cheerfully. "They call her the ice queen, because she favours no one."

Lord Bertram dined at Sir Charles Seaton's and took a great fancy to the Baroness. After that their intimacy grew apace. Jack took to visiting this new friend oftener than anyone else; the Rutherfords' hopes ran high, and Lady Gadsby, the most inveterate of gossips, declared it was pretty plain that Helen would soon be a viscountess.

No one else said so if they thought it, and no one—not even Lady Gadsby—hinted at such a thing to the girl herself. John Bertram came and went. He was Helen's shadow in public, he haunted her uncle's house, but he never spoke a word of love to the beautiful girl, and he never spoke to her of Carly.

He was biding his time. Jack had prepared a deep-laid scheme of vengeance, and he was carefully working it out. That he might burn his own fingers in the operation had never once occurred to him.

And the scheme was this. He had formed it first when he listened to Charles Bouverie's story. He would go home and seek out Nell. He would win her love without ever asking her to be his wife. She should suffer every pang she had meted out to Curly.

It was a deep-laid scheme. Gentleman Jack had made it long before he knew of his own honour, but he would not swerve from it. "Nell" was lovelier and more fascinating than he had anticipated, but that took nothing from her faults. She had broken Charles Bouverie's heart, and Jack resolved she should suffer in her turn.

"I have invited young Bertram to come to us in August," said Sir Charles to his wife the night before they left London. "He seemed pleased at the idea, and I like the young fellow, Nell. He is so frank and sincere."

Helen was sitting opposite her uncle, and she blushed crimson at this praise; but Sir Charles was not an observant man, and he never noticed her confusion.

"It's time Bertram married and settled down. If he leaves no heir the title can't descend in the direct line, but must go to a distant cousin. I haven't forgiven Fenella for her treatment of Hargrave, but if Jack Bertram fancied her it would be a first-rate thing. He's got an iron will, and could keep even a flighty child like her in order, while as he can make her a peeress the little puss would probably be faithful to him."

Lady Seaton answered quickly and with more irritation than she often showed,—

"I should be bitterly grieved if Lord Bertram married Fenella. She is incapable of appreciating him, and he is too noble to be married for his money."

"Come, come, my dear," said Sir Charles, "don't be hard on the child. She's flirted sadly, I confess; but she's no mother to keep her straight, and she's a pretty little creature."

Helen had made her escape. The conversation was exquisitely painful to her, and she could trust Lord Bertram's cause in her aunt's hands.

"Helen is motherless, too," said Lady Seaton, gravely, "and far more beautiful than Fenella; but we don't need to blush for her."

"Helen couldn't do a mean action if she tried," agreed Sir Charles; "but it isn't fair to compare the girls."

"Why not? They are first cousins, and for years were brought up together."

The Baronet sighed.

"Ay, but their mothers were very different people. My poor brother Bob married a fourth-rate actress years older than himself, and they led a cat-and-dog life. Fenella must have seen plenty of matrimonial misery before she was left an orphan at ten years old. Now Bryan married a true-hearted wife, who worshipped him, and thought it her title of honour, not that she was an earl's daughter and an heiress, but that she was Bryan's choice. She only lived a few months after he died. They were both in the grave before Helen was twelve; but I don't suppose she has forgotten what they were to each other. When people say to me they wonder Helen doesn't marry, I only smile; but I always feel the child remembers, and doesn't mean to have a husband till she can love some one as her mother loved my brother."

"I understand," said Lady Seaton, slowly, "her parentage is an excuse for Fenella."

"And her poverty. Of course I have done what I could for her, but every acre of my estate, every penny of my income is entailed. If we have no child all I have must go to Helen. I can't give Fenella a fortune. She is just the kind of girl to value money unduly because she has so little of it. Believe me, Nell, as a rich woman, Fenella would be much more

amiable. That is why I hope she will marry Bertram."

Lady Seaton was a good wife, and generally sided with her husband, but in this case she was bitterly opposed to him. She felt she should be horribly disappointed if her own childish comrade married Fenella Seaton.

CHAPTER IV.

SEATON HALL was the very picture of a fine old English home, and here the two cousins, Helen and Fenella, had spent most of their time since they left school, with this difference between their fates, that the Hall was Fenella's most brilliant sphere. When she was away from it she returned, at her uncle's expense, as a parlour boarder to the school where she and Helen had been educated, while Helen spent that part of her life when she was absent from the Hall, in London, where a kinswoman of her mother's was only too happy to take her into society and make much of her.

Fenella said it was hard. She was two months older than Helen, and loved gaiety dearly, while Helen preferred to mope in the country; but then, as the elder girl did not scruple to point out, of course the heiress of twenty thousand pounds was more popular than a penniless nobody.

Their uncle's marriage had been a great surprise to both cousins; but while Helen "took to" Lady Seaton at once, Fenella actually dared to resent her coming, and in a fit of pique engaged herself to Captain Hargrave.

She soon came to her senses, and decided it would be folly to throw herself away upon a penniless soldier, and certainly no annoyance to her aunt, so she jilted her lover, and Sir Charles was so incensed he packed her off to vegetate at the school for six months, while his wife chaperoned Helen in London.

Most girls would have been somewhat humbled by such treatment, and have returned to Seaton in a very subdued frame of mind; but Fenella came back to the Hall, a week after her relations arrived there, in the best of spirits, so delighted at escaping from the seclusion of Mrs. Marston's establishment that she beamed on everyone.

Lady Seaton, with a sigh, told her husband it was of no use reproaching Fenella, she really could not understand, and Helen thought privately her pretty cousin was rather like Undine before she found her soul.

It was no use to be stern and show disapproval to a creature serenely unconscious of cause for offence.

Helen was obliged to admit Fenella to the same friendly intimacy—it could not be called companionship—which had always prevailed between them, and Lady Seaton took the girl into the next town and bought her a host of pretty clothes, heaping intensely that she would use them to fascinate some other eligible than Lord Bertram.

"Fenella is prettier than ever," Helen said to her aunt the day on which the Viscount was expected, "and she looks about seventeen though she is really older than I am."

And it was true. Fenella was a tiny little creature, with hair that glistened like a golden veil, a milky, colourless complexion, and china blue eyes.

She might have sat for the picture of one of Greuze's shepherdesses.

No one could be angry with Fenella long. She was two-and-twenty, and yet many of her offences were forgiven on the plea that she was "such a child," and even Sir Charles, who had been bitterly incensed with her for her treatment of Captain Hargrave, had already taken her into favour again, and was ready to hope a more eligible suitor might present himself.

Lord Bertram arrived at what many people thought the pleasantest hour of the day, when Lady Seaton presided over a tray of silver and china, and her guests were grouped around her taking afternoon tea.

Some dozen persons were present, with one exception all known to Jack. The only stranger in the assembly was a girl in a white frock and blue sash, who sat at Helen Seaton's feet in the pretty abandon of a child.

"My niece, Fenella Seaton," said his hostess, and Jack found himself shaking hands with the pretty little girl, and wondering what relation she was to stately Helen. Surely, oh! surely, they could not be sisters.

After dinner the younger portion of the company strolled into the grounds, and Lord Bertram found himself at Fenella's side. He began talking to her, and soon asked his question.

"Helen's sister!" exclaimed the pretty girl in amazement, "good gracious! no. You must have lived out of the world, Lord Bertram, to fancy such a thing. Helen is an only child and heiress. Already she has—oh! ever so much money; and if Uncle Charles has no children, some day she will be mistress here, while I—I am just nobody, only her first cousin."

"I thought you could not be sisters, you are not in the least alike."

Fenella was quite alive to Lord Bertram's eligibility as a suitor; if she could but attract his interest she might end her days as an English peeress.

"Helen is very beautiful," she said, looking up at him archly, "lots of people think so."

"She is lovely," admitted Bertram; "but—"

"Oh, be," exclaimed Fenella, "you shouldn't add a 'but,' though I know what you mean—she is a perfect icicle, everyone says so. She has heaps of admirers, and she never gave one of them the least little bit of encouragement. She always reminds me of that woman in the play, that statue rather—"

"You mean Galatea; but Galatea came to life."

"And Helen won't," predicted Fenella, gaily, "she's much too stiff and cold."

They went indoors soon after that, and there was music in the drawing room. Jack listened to Helen's voice in a dream. Was it possible that this beautiful woman, with her sweet, pathetic tones had broken his friend's heart?

Even Fenella's disparagement of her cousin, and Lord Bertram was quick enough to see she meant to prejudice him against Helen, had not hinted at flirtations.

"I wish you would let me ask you a question?" he said to Helen later on, when Fenella was playing a wonderful fantasia, loud enough to drown any ordinary conversation.

Helen blushed crimson. He had never spoken a word of love to her, but—there were times when she fancied he cared for her. Was he going to tell her so now?

"I will answer it if I can," she said, gently. "Do you remember a young fellow called Bouverie, Charles Bouverie? He was a grandson of your uncle's."

His eyes were fixed on her face, and though from the first he had felt she was the siren who had wrecked poor Charles's life, he was not prepared for the change in her. She grew white as death, the hand which toyed with her fan trembled, and the voice in which she answered had a ring of pain.

"I remember Mr. Bouverie perfectly, Lord Bertram. I would give a good deal to hear news of him, to know that he was well and happy."

Another moment and an explanation must have ensued, but they were interrupted. Sir Charles challenged Jack to take a hand at whist, and he was obliged to break off his talk with Helen.

Lord Bertram made no attempt to renew the conversation; that evening and the next day he studiously avoided Helen. When forced to speak to her he was courteous as ever, but he never sought her society. He seemed much attracted to Fenella, and was

generally to be found in attendance on that pretty little maiden.

"Helen," said Lady Seaton, fondly, drawing the girl into her boudoir, when Jack had been a week at the Hall, and things were going on much like this, "have you quarrelled with Lord Bertram?"

"No!" she hesitated. "I have never had a word with him; but yet I am certain he is offended with me."

Lady Seaton thought the same.

"I had hoped you two would understand each other," she said, wistfully. "Jack is such a good fellow, a dozen times too good for Fenella. She would never understand the depths of his heart."

"Too good for Fenella! Helen felt a pang. Had it already come to that? She looked at her aunt with a blank face."

"I have no right to ask Lord Bertram if I have offended him," she said, simply. "We were only friends, nothing more."

"I have a great mind to tell him about Captain Hargrave," cried Lady Seaton, thoroughly roused; "he ought to know what kind of a girl Fenella is."

"Oh, no, aunt Nell, you mustn't. If he cares for her it would make no difference, you know, however much you warned him."

But the explanation—in part at least—was to come that very day. A driving expedition had been planned, and, by Lady Seaton's contrivance, Lord Bertram found himself obliged to escort Helen; that is, his hostess asked him to drive her niece in the dog-cart, and he could not refuse without positive rudeness.

It was a lovely August day, and they had to drive seven or eight miles to some celebrated ruins, where they were to drink tea, boiling the kettle gipsy fashion, and return home in the cool of the evening. Under any other circumstances the excursion would have been perfectly delightful to Helen; as it was, with Bertram's cold, studied politeness reminding her ever of the strange breach between them, she would gladly have changed places with Fenella who made one of a large party in the brake.

At last when they had gone two miles in something approaching to absolute silence, the girl made one desperate effort. She was far too proud to let this man see how his coldness tried her, or even to ask the cause of her offence; but she resolved to carry the conversation back to the last subject he had ever discussed with her in his old friendly manner. It was one full of pain to her; but, at least, Lord Bertram could not reply to her with scant indifferent monosyllables.

"The first night you came here, Lord Bertram, you asked me if I remembered Mr. Bouverie. I have been wanting an opportunity ever since to ask you for news of him."

The voice never trembled. Her self-command never failed. Lord Bertram was confirmed in his opinion. She was the most heartless woman who ever breathed.

"He was my dearest friend," said Jack, with almost brutal frankness. "He died in my arms, and he confided his story to me, and a message for his murderers."

"I am sure he never used that word."

"You are right; he never did. He loved her to the last, ay, and believed in her, too. I came to England, Miss Seaton, resolved to find you out and tell you the truth. Charley forgave you on his death-bed. I am not sure, but he reproached himself for some harsh words he had used to you."

Blank silence only. He could see that the tears had gathered in her beautiful eyes. Had she cared a little for Carly after all?

"He went to the gold fields," went on Jack, bitterly, "and made a fortune. I don't know if he had the forlorn hope that though you had rejected him poor you would listen to him rich. He toiled early and late, he worked beyond his strength, and when camp fever attacked him he had no vital force left to resist it. He was only ill one day, and when he was dying he told me his story. He

seemed to fear, poor fellow, his parting reproaches might linger in your memory and cloud your life. His one prayer was that when I came back to England I would find you and tell you he forgave you, and blessed you with his dying breath."

Helen found her voice at last.

"It is just like him," she said, simply. "Charles Bouverie had the most generous-hearted, loving disposition I ever saw. But oh! I am sorry for your story, Lord Bertram. He was so young. I always hoped he would get over it."

"When you break men's hearts, don't comfort yourself with the reflection they 'will get over it,'" said Jack, bitterly. "Blows like that either send a fellow to the dogs or break his heart. It was the last with Carly. He died on the tenth of February of fever, but the blow was struck when you sent him away with a sneer for his poverly eighteen months before."

A long pause. Then the girl looked up into Jack's face, and said, gravely,—

"Knowing I had done this, why did you come to my uncle's house and treat me as a friend? Why did you associate with one you thought so base?"

"I will tell you," said Bertram, frankly.

"I wanted to be able to tell you what I thought of you. If I had called in Park-lane as an utter stranger and asked to see Miss Seaton, I should have been ushered into your aunt's drawing-room. I couldn't have poured out Charley's story before half-a-dozen people. I wanted to know you sufficiently well to tell you the whole truth. I had yet another motive. If I had found you in the least repentant, I think I should have spared you. If your beauty or spirits had suffered in the least I must have kept back my news; but I found you the belle of Balgravia, the most brilliant of your aunt's circle, and I tell you, Miss Seaton, it made me furious. There was my boy, the only creature I really loved, dead in the flower of his youth, his blighted hopes buried in an African desert; and you, who had brought him to that pass, you, who were, in plain English, his murderer, had gone about free."

"I am glad he had such a friend as you," said Helen, gravely. "I am not going to say a word in my own defence, Lord Bertram. I am not going to question the justice of your accusation, only—I have thought constantly of Charles Bouverie. He and I understood each other thoroughly, and often and often I have wondered what had become of him and whether he had got over his trouble."

"You are speaking in the most heartless fashion," said Jack, angrily. "Miss Fenella is quite right when she declares you have no feeling."

Helen did not answer the taunt. There was a strange far-away look in her beautiful blue-grey eyes, and when she spoke it was in a dreamy way, more as though she were thinking aloud than addressing her companion.

"I think I'm glad, poor boy," breathed the girl; "he would never have believed the truth. He would have wasted his love always on one incapable of returning it; and now he is at rest. It is better so."

Another half mile of silence, and they reached the trying place.

Bertram noticed that Helen looked a little graver than usual as she joined her aunt. Pretty little Fenella was holding a sort of court. While she pretended to unpack the hamper, Jack went up and offered his assistance. What a contrast this simple unaffected child was to her heartless cousin!

But there was a blow in store for Gentleman Jack as the gold-seekers had called him. Before the August day was over he was to know he had been making an egregious blunder, and to feel he would give five years of his life to blot out the taunts he had addressed to Helen Seaton.

Among the crowd of merry-makers who sur-

rounded Fenella was the Rector's eldest daughter.

Brenda Leigh had only just returned from almost two years' exile at a finishing school in Germany. The Leighs were not rich, and the poor child had stayed in Hanover holidays and all. It was no wonder she was in the maddest merriest spirits at finding herself once more at home with all the joys of grown-up young ladyhood before her.

"This is just the day for a picnic, Nelly," she said, cheerfully. "What lovely weather we are having. It was just like this the last summer I was at home. Don't you remember what delightful picnics we used to get up with handsome Mr. Bouverie?"

She certainly said "Nelly," but Helen was not within earshot.

"Don't indulge in reminiscences, Brenda," laughed Fenella, "no one cares for them when they are more than eighteen."

Miss Leigh was not in the least offended.

"Do you know I quite dreaded coming home. I thought everything would be so stiff and horrid with a Lady Seaton at the Hall; but she is just as nice as she can be."

"Aunt Nell ought to be grateful to you," said Fenella, languidly.

"Is that her name?"

"Yes. I think it's a shame that she should take my name away," pouted Fenella. "No one ever thought of calling me anything but Nelly or Nell, and now I have the dreadful title my godparents bestowed on me hurled at me on all occasions."

Lord Bertram had heard enough, but he wished to be doubly sure. When the party dispersed to gather sticks for the fire he placed himself in attendance on Miss Leigh. Brenda felt much flattered, and not a little awed.

"And so you remember Charles Bouverie?" the Viscount said, suddenly. "Do you know, Miss Leigh, he was my dearest friend; but I thought everyone had forgotten him?"

"He was very nice," said the child, frankly.

"He never came here but that once. You see he wanted to marry Nelly, and when she said no he went away."

"And Miss Fenella was called 'Nelly' in those days?"

"Yes; it's only since Lady Seaton came home she has been called anything else. I ought not to have told you that about Mr. Bouverie. Mother said I wasn't to speak of it lest Sir Charles heard, and, besides, it vexed Helen. She and Mr. Bouverie were great friends. We used to wish he had chosen her instead of Nelly. Nelly is very pretty, but somehow one trusts Helen more. She wouldn't have minded if Mr. Bouverie had been as poor as a church mouse if she had cared for him."

"Thank you," said Jack, in a strange, moved tone. "Miss Leigh, you can't tell what you have done for me, and I can't explain—yet. Only I was Charles Bouverie's friend."

"And aren't you now?"

"He died last February."

"Dead!" cried the romantic girl, "I am so sorry. I always hoped he would come back some day and marry Helen. She is ever so much better than little Nelly if he could only think so."

The order of return was altered: Helen went in the wagonette under her aunt's wing. Bertram, dreading he might have to drive Fenella, offered the vacant seat in the dog-cart to Miss Leigh.

The girl's simple chatter pleased him; besides, he felt he owed her a great debt of gratitude for opening his eyes. What a blunder he had made! How could he have been such an idiot as to think beautiful blue-eyed Helen Seaton could have been the Nell of Carly's story!

He had given his friend's message to the wrong person. He had insulted in the cruelest manner the one girl in all the world he had ever wished to marry.

Yes, it had come to this: he loved Helen as

he had not believed it in his nature to love at all. Only loyalty to his dead friend had kept him silent, only a dread of trusting his name to the woman who had broken Carly's heart.

Was it too late? Would she ever forgive him? Surely, when he told her the truth; he would apologise humbly, he would confess he had loved her through all, and then surely she would pardon him.

Alas for his reasonings! Helen's place at dinner was vacant. Lady Seaton declared her niece was tired and suffering from a headache.

At breakfast she was invisible, and Jack, who had prowled about the house ready to pounce on her directly she came downstairs, had the satisfaction of seeing his hostess return from an early drive about eleven.

"I have just taken Helen to the station," she told him, frankly. "The child feels the heat, and I think a few sea breezes will be good for her. One of her cousins is at Eastbourne, and I know she will be glad of Helen, so I have packed her off."

Lord Bertram looked at the lady. Both of them turned back in thought to the days when she had played cricket with him and her brothers in the old Rectory garden.

Jack felt by instinct, however bad things looked, his old chum would understand he had some explanation to offer, and he just stammered out, awkwardly,—

"I've been an awful idiot!"

She smiled.

"Since when have you discovered that?"

"Ever since I heard that 'Nelly' was the pet name of your younger niece."

"Helen is my younger niece."

"Oh, dear! I'm wrong again. Well, at any rate, Helen is not Nelly?"

"No. Nelly is Fenella's pet name, and very angry she was when on my marriage her uncle decided she must henceforward be content with her own baptismal title."

Lord Bertram looked at his old play-fellow.

"I am sure sea breezes would do me good," he said, airily, "and Eastbourne is no end of a place. I mean to start to-night, Lady Seaton. What message shall I take from you to Miss Helen?"

"Don't you think you will have enough to do with the explanation which you have not offered me?"

"You will wish me good-speed?"

"Yes," she said, gravely. "I am very fond of Helen, and I have always declared she had a heart, when anyone could find the key to it; if you can do that, Lord Bertram, you will be fortunate."

"And the address?"

"I am not going to tell it you. Buy a visitors' list, and you will see where Mrs. Neville is staying."

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

EASTBOURNE in the season is a very fashionable resort, and hardly the sort of place to which a romantic damsel with a love trouble would flee for refuge; but Helen Seaton was not romantic, and her one desire was to escape from Seaton Hall to some spot where she would not be likely to meet Lord Bertram.

She loved him or her course would have been easier. If only her whole heart had not gone out to Jack she would have seen his mistake had, after all, not been an unnatural one, and in a few words could have explained all.

But things were very different now. With eyes sharpened by love, Helen had seen Jack well nigh caught in Fenella's snare. He did not love the pretty coquette, but he was attracted by her kittenish ways. How could the woman who yearned for his affection herself tell him the truth that he had reversed the identity of the cousins, and his scathing condemnation belonged of right to Fenella?

"If he marries her I only pray he may never find out the truth," thought the girl with a bitter pang. "To know he had given his name and honour into the keeping of the

girl who wrecked his friend's life would be a crushing blow."

Away from Seaton, away from the chance of meeting Lord Bertram, and reading scorn in his dark eyes, Helen felt braver.

After all, a man who could think so basely of her was not worth regretting, and even if he married Fenella it was no concern of hers.

Helen tried hard to persuade herself she didn't care, but for all that her thoughts would settle on Lord Bertram and his supposed wooing to the exclusion of all else.

It was a long journey to Eastbourne, and quite dusk when she arrived there.

Mrs. Neville, warned by a telegram of her coming, was at the station, and took the girl into her arms with a motherly tenderness which was touching in one so young, for she was still only a little over twenty.

"It is delightful to have you, Helen," she declared, "and I am quite in love with your aunt for sending you; but how awfully worn and tired you look! Was the journey too much for you, or haven't you been well?"

"I did too much in London, and it has been so hot ever since we went home, but the sea air will soon set me up. Where is the Colonel?"

"In Scotland shooting grouse. I am alone here with the chicks. I do hope, Helen, you won't be dull."

"No one could be dull with you, Katy, and though I am sorry to miss the Colonel, it will be very nice having you all to myself."

They were only second cousins, but Katy Neville was one of the last links that connected Helen with the mother's family. They had always been firm friends, and when Katy married, which she was foolish enough to do at seventeen, Helen, then rather a sly, singular child of twelve, was chief bridesmaid.

"And you like your uncle's wife?" demanded pretty Mrs. Neville that evening at supper, for she dined early in her husband's absence, and devoted herself to her children.

"She is really kind?"

"She is goodness itself, and oh! Katy, it is a relief not to be the sole feminine authority at the Hall, always preaching propriety to Fenella."

"Fenella ought to be shut up in a convent till a millionaire came forward to marry her," pronounced Mrs. Neville; "but dear, if Lady Seaton is so kind, why are you looking so pale and troubled?"

"I—I don't know!"

Katy believed this was a fib; but having been in love herself she was merciful, and did not insist on a more exact explanation.

"We don't breakfast till half-past nine," she said, as she bade Helen good-night; "but nurse shall bring you a cup of tea when the children have theirs, and then if you like to take a stroll you won't be quite starved. I'm a shocking character, and never come down till after the breakfast-bell has rung."

It was a lovely morning, and Helen decided it was positively wicked to stay in doors. She was up and dressed before, at eight o'clock, nurse appeared with some tea and toast; and these refreshments discussed, she went out on to the esplanade, with the happy consciousness she need not think of retracing her steps for more than an hour.

Now, however crowded Eastbourne may be in August, it is not at eight o'clock that the visitors congregate on the esplanade. Far away among the bathing machines, some extra energetic persons were having an early dip, but the seats on the upper esplanade were nearly deserted. Most people were undertaking the mysteries of their toilet, while nursemaids and children were engaged, like the little Nevilles, with breakfast.

Past the Wish Tower, down the steps to the beach, walked Helen; and as she stood on the rough shingle, and listened to the music of the waves as they beat upon the pebbles, somehow the lullaby seemed to soothe the pain at her heart.

"Helen!"

She started. Someone unperceived had fol-

lowed her ever since she left Lindfield gardens, and now he stood beside her. They two were quite alone with the glittering sea before them.

"Helen!"

It was Lord Bertram's voice, not in scorn and anger as she had last heard it; but in agitated entreaty. She turned and raised her eyes to his, and somehow the truth flashed from his soul to hers. This was not Fenella's lover, this was not another woman's lover, but hers—hers only.

"I know everything," he said, sadly; "can you ever forgive my unwarrantable behaviour?"

"I guessed at the time you thought I was 'Nelly.' You believed Charles Bouverie cared for me?"

He bowed his head.

"It was torture to me. I had learned to love you better than aught else, and yet it seemed sacrilege to my dead friend to tell you so. I knew that in all the world you were the one wife for me, and yet, with his dying words ringing in my ears I dared not tell you so."

"It hurt me that you should think such things of me," she whispered, "and yet I could not set you right, because I fancied you—you cared for Fenella."

"I never did. I thought her a vision of childlike innocence. I admired her as a pretty, artless girl; but love her as a man should love his wife—no."

"Who told you?"

"No one directly. I heard little Miss Leigh ask your cousin if she was no longer called 'Nelly,' and then—the truth seemed to come on me with a rush. I wanted to confess my mistake to you that very evening, but you were invisible."

"The picnic was only the day before yesterday," she said suddenly, "you speak as if it were weeks ago."

"It seems years to me," declared Lord Bertram; then he added, in a grave, stern voice: "I saw your cousin before I left Seaton Hall, and now Charles's message has reached the right person at last."

Helen sighed.

"I was very fond of him," she said, simply. "From the first I seemed to see how things would go, and I was sorry."

"Did she care for him at all?"

"As much as she could care for anyone. If Charles Bouverie had had five thousand a-year she would have been devoted to him."

"She called me a monster when I told her of his death, and cried as though she would never leave off. Half-an-hour after she was playing tennis with Mr. Jarvis."

"Aunt Nelly thinks Fenella will marry Mr. Jarvis."

"Why, he must be sixty!"

"But he's very rich."

"Bah! Don't talk of Fenella," said Lord Bertram. "When shall we be married?"

"In a few years time."

"Helen!"

"I don't think there is any hurry," said the girl, sweetly, "and I'd rather you got to know me thoroughly first. I don't want you to fancy yourself in love with me just because I am not Nelly."

"I loved you when I believed you were that very person."

Her hand was in his, she nestled the least bit closer to him.

"I care for so few people," she whispered, "and when I care I can't bear for them to change."

"I shall never change, sweetheart. You are my first love, Helen, and you will be my last. Darling, don't let us trifle with our happiness, put your hand in mine and promise to be my wife."

And there beside the rippling waves she gave the promise, and it seemed to her that in the giving it she flooded her own life with sunshine.

Before Helen returned to Seaton Hall the

news reached her of Fenella's engagement to Mr. Jarvis. The wedding was to be hurried on because the bridegroom wished to leave England before the cold weather.

Lord Bertram had a sudden petition to make to Helen.

"Dear, I could not bear to see you your cousin's bridesmaid, or to feel that she was yours. I want you to do me a favour and marry me here at once. Your uncle and aunt will forgive us when I explain that a grand wedding would be impossible while I am still in mourning for my brother; and my people will be so glad to see me happily married, they won't try to interfere with the details of the ceremony."

Mrs. Neville seconded the Viscount.

"Lord Bertram is so rich, the settlements can wait till afterwards, and really, Helen, Fenella has cast a baneful influence over you. I am like your *fancé*, I can't bear the thought of her being your bridesmaid, or of your being hers."

Lady Seaton appealed to, presently wrote back she thought the bride and bridegroom-elect both people to know their own minds, and that they should please themselves. If Mrs. Neville did not mind making the arrangements, she and Sir Charles would come down in time for the wedding, as her husband would like to give his niece away.

Lord and Lady Bertram were on their honeymoon in Italy when a paragraph in an English paper told them it was no idle presentiment which had made Jack so anxious to have his wedding before Fenella's. It seemed now that last would not be soon.

Mr. Jarvis had met with an accident: as he was riding home from Seaton Hall his horse kicked and threw him. He was picked up dead, and Fenella, who in a month's time would have been a millionaire's wife, remained penniless Miss Seaton.

The old Earl is dead now, and Gentleman Jack and his beautiful wife are Lord and Lady Rutherford.

There is a small Charles Bouverie Bertram now, whom strangers call "the little Viscount," and a tiny Helen, about whom her father has the strangest whim. Never will he suffer admiring friends or relatives to address her tiny ladyship by the name of Nell. In vain Sir Charles tells him there cannot be two Helens under one roof; the Earl persists, and has his way.

And the "Nelly" who poisoned Lord Rutherford's heart against the name, the "Nelly" of Curly's love story? Well, Fenella is still Miss Seaton, and seems likely to remain so. She and her cousin meet sometimes at the Hall; but she has never been Helen's guest. Jack feels, somehow, a blight would fall on his home if he received there the woman who caused his friend's early death and HIS GREAT BLUNDER.

[THE END.]

SOMEBODY has discovered that much time is lamentably wasted in slitting open envelopes, especially when one has a large correspondence; and in order to economise the precious moments this ingenious person has devised a means of opening letters at lightning speed by means of a thread run across the fold of the flap. An end of the cotton is left out when the envelope is stuck down, and one has only to pull this upwards to open the letter as if by magic.

A good deal of the dew which we see in the morning covering the leaves of grasses and other plants comes from the interior of the vegetables themselves. The extremely fine dew, as a rule, is atmospheric, but the larger drops which we find on the margins of leaves are, in general, exudations from the plant tissues. And this fact explains why much of the dew which is analysed is not as pure as it should be, if it were wholly derived, as is generally supposed, from the condensation of the water-vapour of the air.

GOLD and precious stones as medical remedies were once largely used by the rich. A queen of France, consulting her physician in 1420, secured the following prescription, which was filled by the court druggist: "Nine-eighths of an ounce of emeralds, five-eighths of an ounce of Alexandria rubies, and five-eighths of an ounce of jacinths mixed with a drachm of gold." The gold and precious stones were reduced to the form of powder and prepared with honey.

PARLIAMENT is the only public assembly in England where gentlemen elect to conduct business with their hats on. But whilst this privilege is enjoyed, and largely partaken of, it is strictly limited to the sitting position. A member who crossed the floor with his hat on would be howled at with that especial fervour of indignation which members reserve for these breaches of etiquette. A member sitting in a corner seat below the gangway, and desiring to speak to a member at the other corner, may not lean across the space with his hat on, but must make the movement uncovered.

TEA MAKING in Japan is a fine art. The teapot is small and dainty like those sold for bric-a-brac at Japanese shops, and the tea-cups often of fine *Oloisones*, with plain enamelled linings, are each no larger than a giant's thumb. With them is a pear-shaped pitcher for boiling water, and a lacquer box containing choice tea. Among the rich these appurtenances accompany a brand of tea so rare that none of it is ever exported. The Japanese host scoops out enough of the precious herb, with an ivory implement shaped like a large tealeaf, to loosely fill the little teapot. He then pours over it hot, not boiling, water, and in less than a moment the teamaker begins to pour off a stream of pale yellow tea into cups which are never filled more than half-way up, and they are at once served to visitors and the family. It is needless to say that the tea, losing no part of its delicate aroma, is as fragrant and delicate as any concoction can possibly be. How different from the coarse, clumsy teamaking of the American, or rather of Bridget's method! Of course, the tea is slowly sipped, yet even then it is strong enough to keep the guest awake half the night, unless he is accustomed to Japanese teamaking.

A SINGULAR observance, prevails, in Clifford's Inn, no longer an Inn of Court but a faded nook lying off Fleet-street. A writer says:—"That society is divided into two sections—the Principal and Aules, and the Junior or 'Kentish Men.' When the meal is over, the chairman of the Kentish Men, standing up at the Junior table, bows gravely to the Principal, takes from the hand of a servitor standing by four small rolls of bread, silently dashes them three times on the table, and then pushes them down to the further end of the board, whence they are removed. Perfect silence is preserved during this mystic ceremony. It has been suggested by some antiquaries that this singular custom typifies offerings to Ceres, who first taught mankind the use of laws, and originated those peculiar ornaments of civilisation their expounders, the lawyers. It appears that the four little loaves are baked together so as to form a cross, and that the chairman, raising this symbol above his head, strikes it down on the table three times. This has been supposed to have reference to the three persons of the trinity. The removal of the little loaves along the table is supposed to intimate that what is left of the repast is to go to the poor. Till a few years ago this was done, a number of old women waiting at the buttery to receive the broken meats. The only toasts are 'Ancient and Honourable' and 'Absent Members,' and no speeches are allowed. Leigh Hunt declares that there are three things to notice in Clifford's Inn; its little bit of turf and trees, its quiet, and its having been the residence of Robert Paltock, author of the curious narrative of 'Peter Wilkins,' with its flying women."

THE information that shamrakh is the Arabic word for trefoll may be of service to those interested in the origin of the Irish race. The word could have been introduced by the Milesians, or it may furnish an argument in support of the contention that one of the lost ten tribes of Israel settled in Ireland.

In many parts of Switzerland smooth flat stones, evidently hand-polished, are often poked up. They are covered with lines, dots, circles and half circles, and are known to the Swiss as "schalensteines." The origin and use of these stones has long been a mooted point among the learned. Some have thought that they were charms, others that they were meant to commemorate the dead.

It is a tradition in Austria that if an unmarried man destroy the eye of an unmarried woman, he must within two twelvemonths, make her his wife, or "mourn where'er he go, his days full of woe; in life or death he shall know no rest, his body accout, his soul unblest, woe to him on earth or air, woe to him for ever and e'er." A tale is told of a Prince Karl, who accidentally put out the eye of a peasant girl. He wanted to marry her, but the king would not consent, and great misfortune pursued both. The king was killed, and the prince after incredible suffering, committed suicide.

Is there any mysterious reason why people with light hair should become seasick quicker than those with dark? Yet an official on an Atlantic liner says:—"I can tell 'em as soon as them come on the boat whether they are going to be seasick or not. When I see a girl with light hair and light blue eyes, who walks in with a kind of uncertain gait, as if she did not know exactly where she was stepping, I say to myself, 'Young lady, you'll be sick before we are an hour out.' But when the black-eyed woman comes, who walks on board the boat just as if she had business there, I know that any ordinary sea will not affect her in the least. Three-quarters of the people who become seasick on this steamer are decided blondes. You may laugh at this, but I have made quite a study of it, and I tell you I am right. If we had a rough time I suppose it would fetch them all. But these light-haired people will keel over and want to die quicker than anybody. Why is it?"

WHAT will the discoveries and inventions of the nineteenth century leave to the twentieth? Steamboats and railroads, ocean steamer navigation, clipper ships, and screw propellers have been invented; the powers and mysteries of electricity have been developed to the uses of mankind; implements and machinery to enable farmers to master the tillage of thousands of acres with less toil than was required in the cultivation of the small farm of less than one hundred acres; lighting by gas was introduced, metal pens and friction matches were invented; aluminium was discovered; also chloroform, iridium, lithium, magnesium, palladium, potassium, quinine, rubidium, ruthenium, strontium, thallium, yttrium, and zirconium; daguerreotypes and photography, phonography, the stethoscope, the complete sewing machine, the bicycle, the revolver and Gatling gun, and the tremendous explosives used in quarrying, mining and gunnery. The steam printing press was an invention of the early years of the century, now developed to the printing of many thousands of sheets per hour. Electricity has been reduced and trained to the uses of mankind in every conceivable manner, and Edison has made its powers the wonder of the age. Franklin caught it, Morse reduced and utilised it to the uses of telegraphy, Field and his associates employed it, Pack-like, to cable continents and belt the world with instantaneous inter-communication. Electric light and railways are among the wonders which are in common use. The phonograph and telephone are trained mysteries, which everybody uses. What will there be for the twentieth century to discover or invent?

PRETTY PENELOPE.

CHAPTER XIII.

To fling himself from the saddle and advance towards Penelope was but the work of a moment to Denis.

"You are hurt. What has happened?" His voice was laden with fear, with anxiety.

Penelope had turned even whiter than she had been before. He had come upon her so unexpectedly. She tried to smile, but her lips seemed frozen, and her big eyes were full of the suffering she was enduring, that was almost greater mentally at this moment than physically.

"I have been thrown," she said, speaking as well as she could. "The mare shied, and before I could prevent it, she had gone down and—"

"And you are hurt. Tell me how you feel. Good heavens! this is horrible. Why are you alone so far from Stevenstone. How came you to ride such a distance by yourself? It is worse than folly."

While he uttered these quick sentences, Denis was fastening his horse securely to a gate close by.

He came back to her when this was finished. "Can you stand? Where do you feel the pain. Give me your hand. Don't be frightened. Good heavens! do you think I would hurt you?"

"I am not frightened," Penelope answered, as steadily and as bravely as she could. The effort to seem quite at ease with him was a tremendous one coming at such a moment when every nerve in her body was jarring and quivering from the effect of the fall and sudden shock to her system. She was trembling all over; but it was from this nervous effort, not from fear.

She let him take her hand passively; but at the first touch of his strong tender fingers, a thrill of comfort, of sudden pleasure, sharp strong as fire, ran through her frame.

"I—I don't think I can stand just yet, Denis," she had to confess as he put his arm about her, and drew her up slowly, her face blanched again this time from acute pain. "My—my right foot," she said, in answer to the eager inquiry on his lips and in his eyes.

For one instant Denis held her slight form clasped close to him. He felt the quiver in her limbs, then a sudden feebleness in the lovely young body that drooped more heavily in his hold. The thought that she was suffering was nothing less than torture to him.

"Be brave, my darling," he said, all unconscious of the words he used or of the passion that escaped him and rang in his voice. "Lean on me, Penelope. I am going to put you down again, and then I am going to examine this little foot. You will trust to me, Penelope dear, will you not? You know I will not hurt you more than I can possibly help; but I must see how far you are injured. If—if the bone is broken," his face grew white as he said this, "I shall leave this boot on; but if as I hope and believe it is only a sprain, why then I shall know how to give you ease until I get you a doctor somehow from somewhere."

"Madge has gone for one," Penelope managed to say, with her lips ashen white. "I—I was not alone. Madge Riley was with me. She rode back to Little Winstead. I—I thought you were she when—"

And then Penelope had to sit very, very quietly while Denis took the small foot into his strong hands and passed his fingers gently but with something like dexterity about the ankle and injured limb.

"The bone is safe," he said, after what seemed an age. "Now, Penelope, be very still. I am going to get this boot off. No, I am not going to hurt you. See, I shall cut it straight through with this knife. You had no idea I was so clever, had you?"

Penelope did not smile or answer. She was in excessive pain. She wondered in a weary,

heavy sort of way whether it could be possible for one to suffer more than she was doing at this moment. The sudden joy, the intense comfort called up so naturally and so unconsciously by Denis's near presence faded away now, and only a deepening of the mental pain remained. His tender words, the love that rang out so clearly in his voice and shone in his eyes, made the burden all the greater, the task before her all the more difficult.

Ill as she had been when he had appeared so unexpectedly, Penelope's eyes had been keen enough to see the change that was wrought on Denis's face. She had no need of explanation to know only too well that her mother's fears for his future were but too surely founded, that in his marriage with Marcia he would have no happiness, that his engagement was a great, a terrible mistake.

The girl's already overlaid heart shrank beneath these bitter thoughts, and the vague feeling of remorse and self-reproach which had lived with her ever since the day she had worked so hard and so successfully to drive Denis away grew now into absolute and divine form.

It was she who had done this, she who had brought about this chapter of folly which was to end in such misery. She loved him better than her life, and yet her hand had worked the greatest harm to him and driven him down a path which must for ever be shadowed with disappointment, regret, and disillusionment.

Denis, glancing now and then at the white, set face, that was rigid and hard with the intensity of constraint that Penelope had put upon herself, was full of anxiety and yet of admiration for her courage and quietness.

He was surprised at her self-control. It was not what his former impression of Penelope's character would have led him to expect under such circumstances.

The old feelings, however, towards her did not assert themselves in this moment. Denis forgot his anger and his contempt. Love alone rose in his thoughts, filling his being, blinding his eyes and dulling his remembrance of all that had happened, and all that lay before him in the future.

With gentle hands and careful touch he cut away the riding boot and freed the foot and ankle, which were considerably swollen.

"No use waiting for this doctor," he said, cheerfully; and taking off his white silk neck wrap he tore it into strips, and bound it tenderly and firmly about the aching limb.

Penelope sat very still as he knelt in the mud at her feet. A dreamy sensation came over her, a weary acquiescence to fate mingled with a thought,—

"It would be good to die now—now while his heart is softened towards me and he loves me a little."

His doctoring over, Denis stood upright and looked yearningly at the lovely pale face, more lovely than ever in his sight with that wan pallor on it, the weakness of womanhood proclaimed in every line.

"If I only had some brandy!" he exclaimed, as she sat with her eyes averted from him. "It is to be hoped Miss Riley will think to bring some. How long were you alone before I came up? Is it time for her to be back by now?"

He stepped into the road and looked down the lane where Penelope's late companion should appear. There was no sign of the returning horsewoman or her relief.

"What you would have suffered if I had not chanced to come!" Denis said, hurriedly, his brows knitting at her evident pain. "I wish I had you back in Stevenstone village."

"I asked Madge to bring a fly if possible," Penelope said, trying to speak and be composed. "You—you must not let me keep you here, Denis. She is sure to come soon—and—and—"

He did not answer at first, he was still looking down the road; as she ceased, and sat again in silence, he said, and this time his voice was no longer tender,—

"It is impossible for me to leave you—you know that very well."

Penelope coloured a little.

"I don't see the impossibility," she answered, with a touch of her old spirit. "If you had not come, I should have had to sit alone. Of course I—it was very good of you. I am grateful." Penelope was floundering a little, and then her face brightened. "I hear wheels coming—it must be Madge!"

Denis turned on her almost savagely.

"You surely need not be so ready to show me you do not want me!" he said.

Penelope bit her lip.

Oh! how hard it was to have to play this part, to seem always in his eyes the opposite of what she was. The very pain that this thought brought her, coupled with the remembrance of Marcia, gave her strength.

"Your temper is just as bad as ever, Denis," she said, in her most indignant, impertinent fashion; "and really you are most difficult—did I even suggest that I wanted you to go away? I am not so silly. I may want you to do more things for me. You can be useful even if you are disagreeable!"

Denis made no answer; he went forward, and, with a good pretence of indifference, began running his hands down the legs of the mare who had been the cause of Penelope's disablement.

Penelope, safe from the glance of his keen eyes, let her own rest on his handsome form, with a yearning that was so great she had to press her lips tight together to prevent a cry escaping them. Oh! to be able to cling to those strong arms, to nestle close to his heart, to lay her head on his shoulder and meet the world with his love as a shield and a bulwark of protection! She waited for him to speak, to give her time to frame her words and to school her voice. As the moments passed, and he was still silent, she spoke again with a wonderful assumption of petulance.

"I really think it is so silly of you to lose your temper so easily, Denis. Now, what did I do to make you flare up like you did just now? You are as growly as any old bear. I can't say," she finished with a boldness that sounded very like the old Penelope of Waveton days.—"I can't say I envy my cousin Marcia very much. I hear she is going to be your wife, poor thing!"

Denis turned his head and opened his lips as though to say something, but the words were unuttered. Penelope drew a deep, sharp breath. Miserable as this noting was, it was safe at least—there was no danger of hearing the love melody in his voice; of seeing the love light gleam from his eyes, while that black shadow brought up so easily by her words and manner rested on his face. Hard as it was to know the hot, contemptuous thoughts this manner produced, Penelope felt she was better fit to bear that old burden than combat the new and miserable element of his love, which must never be love for her any more.

"The wheels are coming much nearer; go and see if it is Madge," she said, after a pause. "You know, Denis," with a weary shadow of her usual happy laugh, "though you think me a beast, and I—I think much the same about you—we shall have to pretend to like one another now that we are going to be cousins, and—" then Penelope broke off. "Oh! it is Mr. De Burgh's brougham," she cried. "How lucky! perhaps he is there. Yes, I think I see him. Now I shall be all right."

Denis's face flashed crimson.

"Penelope," he said, in a voice that was full of passion, and then he stopped abruptly.

The reality of everything returned to him in that instant. The old miserable struggle between love and contempt for this girl, the mad jealousy, the hot anger that was so unreasoning and so foolish, the memory of Marcia.

He turned away too quickly to see the look that flashed into Penelope's eyes as that

one word escaped him. Had that look met his, it must have revolutionised his whole mind—have shown him all that she had worked so hard and so cleverly to conceal. But as it was he saw nothing, was conscious of nothing, but that strong sound of pleasure and satisfaction in the girl's voice as she caught sight of Harold De Burgh coming towards her. The Rector sprang quickly out of the brougham as it stopped.

"I have just met Miss Riley and learnt of your accident," he said, as he hurried towards her, and his tone was full of agitation. "We thought it better I should return for you and take you back to Stevenstone. There is no doctor to be had in Little Winstead, but Miss Riley has ridden on to warn Doctor Westall you are coming, and to have everything in readiness for you. I—I am too late to do anything for you, I see. Clergymen as he was, it was not possible for Harold De Burgh to subdue all natural feelings.

"Mr. Latimer has been more than good," Penelope said, trying very hard about this period not to cry. It was easy enough to get a part with Denis when she was alone with him and when she was well and strong. But now, with her limbs weary and racked with pain, her heart like a lump of fire in her breast, her memory vivid as to the last time Denis had seen her with Harold De Burgh, and the conclusions he must have drawn from that sight for all her courage, all her pride, Penelope could endure very little more.

"I—I shall be glad to get away from here," she said with a shiver. "It is very good of you, Mr. De Burgh. I—I will go."

She tried to lift herself, and then as the Rector bent forward she looked at that other tall form standing aloof with the white stern face.

"Denis—will—you," she murmured. She was conscious long enough to feel the touch of his hands. Then as she whispered eagerly and scarcely audibly, "mother—mother—the must—not—be frightened—I—must—get—back—and—you will—ride—on—you will not let her think I—" the words died away, and the slender burden in Denis's strong arms lay still and inert as death.

A pang like a knife went through Denis's heart. Like lightning his anger gave place once more to his love—love and pity and admiration, and this time another feeling, a strong throb of remorse, as he remembered how he had held this girl so adamant to all human feelings, blind to all that was pure and sweet and good. That broken sentence pregnant with love and anxiety for her mother was like a gleam of light across the darkness of the picture that his mind had drawn of Penelope.

The whole secret of his heart lay open on his face as he stood for this moment holding the woman he loved clasped in his arms.

Harold De Burgh's face was scarcely less white and agitated than his. The Rector paused only a moment, then he spoke very quietly.

"I think I understand what she wishes. We will drive straight to Dr. Westall's, while you go and pay a visit to Mrs. Desborough, and keep her interested and free from anxiety. We must do all we can to guard the mother, she is so frail now, poor thing. No doubt Mrs. Desborough will expect to see you, Mr. Latimer. It is hardly the best moment, perhaps—Harold De Burgh smiled faintly as he spoke—"but you will allow me, I hope, to offer you my best wishes and sincere hopes for your future happiness."

Denis gave a great start. For one instant longer he held Penelope's slender form to his heart—the fall, the utter renunciation of all joy, of all happiness that was written on his white face touched a chord of pity in the breast of the other man—pity that outstripped the jealousy, the meanness, and baser feelings which were so natural to one who found himself confronted with the actual cause of his own unhappiness.

Harold De Burgh had feared these many

days past that his chance for success with Penelope was almost hopeless. He knew it for a certainty now, yet he could not withhold his pity for the man who possessed that for which his heart had craved in vain.

In this moment, a crucial one to Denis Latimer, the justice must be given to Harold De Burgh that the words he spoke recalling Denis from his dream to the reality of his position were uttered from a sense of that strong moral right which belonged to Harold not only as an attribute of his profession, but a great portion of his nature.

Honour was to him the standard-bearer of life. In that one moment, though his heart throbbed with all the desires and hopes of manhood, the sight of Denis's moral danger recalled him to his duty. He spoke at the right moment and to the right man.

Even as his words died away Denis clasped his hold about Penelope, and put her into the Rector's arms, only waiting till he saw the girl's lovely death-like face resting on the soft cushions of the brougham, her eyes closed to the world, her mind oblivious to the drama that was being played about her. Then he held out his hand to Harold De Burgh.

"I will leave her with you," he said, his voice very quiet and dull, "and I will ride on to her mother. I hope and trust there will be no cause for anxiety. At any rate we must spare her all we can."

Denis turned away and took his horse by the bridle. As he passed the Rector again, he said, in a low deep tone,—

"Thank you, De Burgh, you have done well;" and mounting hurriedly, he rode down the lane out of sight.

CHAPTER XIV.

By sheer courage, strength of will, and unbounded love Penelope managed to conceal from her mother the truth of her accident and the extent of the injury she had received from her fall.

Denis was still sitting with Mrs. Desborough, listening to her gentle voice in a misty far-off way, his eyes fixed on the dark path outside, his ears keen for the first approach of the girl, when the door of the sitting-room opened, and Penelope stood on the threshold.

She was laughing, her habit was cleansed from the greater part of the mud that had splattered it, enough being left to look natural to the result of a long ride on such a day. Her cheeks were red, her eyes sparkling.

She leaned her small, ungloved hand on the doorway, as though for effect; in reality, as Denis was only too quick to see, for support. She waved her riding crop in the air.

"All hail to the bridegroom!" she cried, gaily. "I would come and make obeisance, my lord Denis, but I am a walking mud heap. Mumsey, you must dispense with a kiss for the moment. By-by!"

Mrs. Desborough stretched out her hand. "Do you think I am frightened of mud? Come and kiss me, my baby," she said, tenderly.

Denis saw Penelope's face contract, the lines round the mouth grew hard. Involuntarily he sprang to his feet, and would have advanced towards her, but at one glance from her eyes he stood still.

He saw her pause an instant, lean a little longer against the door-post, then rearing her head, and grasping the heavy folds of her habit as if that would give her support, she moved from the door across the floor stiffly, with absolute agony, the man watching her could feel almost every throb of pain herself, but with only a very little difference to her usual gait.

"Oh! my darling, you are tired out," Mrs. Desborough said, with a touch of anxiety in her voice, "you have done too much, Pen."

"Stiff, mumsey, only stiff. Haven't ridden for so long, and—Denis, don't listen please—

mumsey, I have a confession. My boots are too small, and they pinch me. I am as lame as anything. I don't believe anyone's vanity ever was so punished as mine."

Mrs. Desborough kissed the lips bent down to hers; the lamps were not lit, and the dusk hid the sudden pallor that, against all her will and control, spread over Penelope's face. As she lifted herself Denis caught her eyes bent on him.

"Help me—help me!" they said as clearly as lips could speak. "I can do no more."

With his heart beating like a sledge hammer in his breast he rushed to obey that glance.

"Pride must suffer pain, Miss Pen, as everyone knows! Now, if I am any judge of things, I consider you have suffered just enough punishment from those tight boots, and so,"—coming forward and putting his arms about her in a way that gave her intense comfort yet horrible, horrible mental pain,— "and so, now is my opportunity for winning that bet we had at Waveton. You remember you said I could not carry you upstairs. I am just going to show you I can, and two of you—twenty for the matter of that!"

"Denis, how dare you! Mumsey, won't you help me?" Penelope made a faint of frightening him off.

"I think Denis is quite right, and I am all on his side," laughed Mrs. Desborough, only too glad to see a sign of mirth and pleasure about the young man. Despite all his efforts Denis had made her rather unhappy and low-spirited about him as they had sat chatting during the past afternoon.

And so for a second time Denis held close to his heart the sweetest burden in the whole world to him. There was something strangely like a tear in his eyes, as in silence broken only by a gasping sigh or a little moan from the girl's ashen, brave lips, he carried Penelope up to her pretty low-roofed room.

He laid her on the bed with its white frilled pillows and draperies Penelope's own particular little handmaiden, by name Kate, was waiting there in a fever of anxiety to receive her.

"Oh! sir, has she fainted? She didn't ought to have done it. Miss Riley's downstairs in an awful state, and Dr. Westall he says he washes his hands of her." This last in a tone of horror. Kate evidently imagined Dr. Westall's wrath to be something very terrible. "But Miss Penelope she would do it. She never do think of herself when it's to spare mistress anything!" and then Kate gave a cry of alarm at Penelope's face, and began pouring eau de cologne about recklessly and holding salts to the pretty nose in a despairing sort of way.

Penelope had not fainted, however. She opened her eyes after a moment and gave a feeble, flickering smile.

"Go and see if Dr. Westall is downstairs," Denis said to the servant. "Then as he was alone he knelt suddenly beside the figure on the bed, and taking up the hem of the wet habit pressed his lips to it passionately once—twice—three times.

Penelope put out her hand.

"Don't! don't!" she said, almost sharply.

"Denis, I command you!"

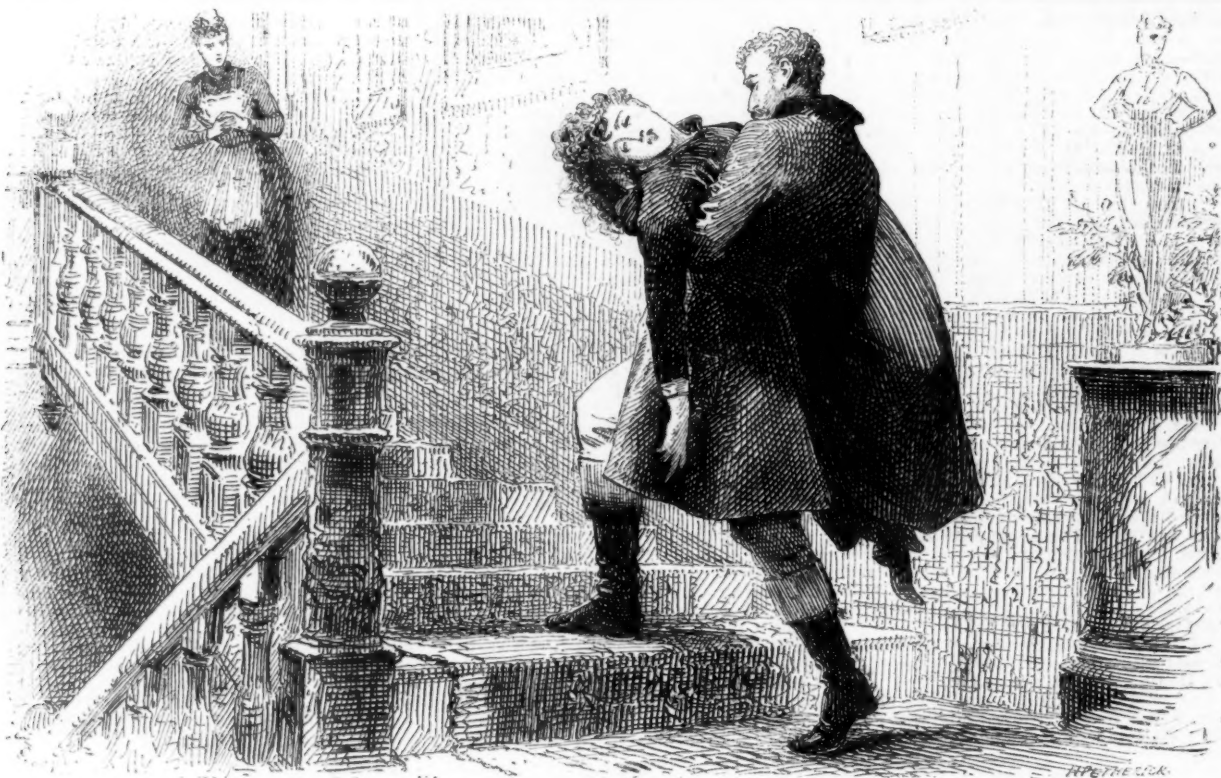
"How I have wronged you? How I have wronged you?" he answered, rising obediently.

"Oh! Penelope—Penelope!"

"Go," she said, almost inaudibly—the agony of remorse and love on his face frightened her in this moment, the full misery of what her girlish pride had brought about touched her with alarm—"mother—please Denis—go to mother—"

Without another word, another look, he turned and left her. On the landing outside he came upon the doctor, who had crept up noiselessly behind Kate.

"Of course—of course," he said, angrily, to Denis. "I knew the result of such a mad act. Might as well talk to a wall as that child. Good heavens! what a will she has. Harm her? of course it must harm her. She ought not to have put her foot to the ground for at



[DENIS HELD CLOSE TO HIS HEART THE SWEETEST BURDEN IN THE WHOLE WORLD TO HIM!]

least ten days. I don't know that I will answer for the consequences."

"It was her love," Denis said, speaking with the utmost difficulty.

Was there to be no end to the misery that was clouding thick and fast about him. Would he ever be able to breathe again freely, and without that pain like a knife running sharply through his breast. It seemed as though old age had come upon him all at once. His limbs were weighted as with iron; his head was full of a heaviness, a confusion that blinded his eyes and dulled his ears.

Dr. Westall answered him testily.

"Oh! I knew it was her love; but even love can go too far, and after all, although I told her the other day her mother's heart action was growing weaker slowly but surely, and that all unnecessary excitement must be avoided, I did not, of course, foresee a possibility like this occurring—how could I? I only hope I shall not have the child on her back for a month, and that's about what it will be; and as her mother must know then, well, I don't see—"

Penelope's voice came out from her room faint, but clear and determined. She had overheard every word.

"She shall not know," said the voice, "and if you dare to tell her, Dr. Westall, and if you think I am going to stay here a week, you are very greatly mistaken."

Dr. Westall laughed grimly, but with a look of sincere affection in his face. He had known Penelope since her birth, and loved the girl well.

"A nice sort of patient I have got on my hands now," he said, passing on, and leaving Denis with a nod.

How the next quarter of an hour sped away Denis could never have told. He only realised that at last he was outside in the lane leading his horse, and listening to Dr. Westall speaking with a sense of dereliction and despair upon him too great for description. The doctor had joined him immediately on leaving the house.

"That's a wonderful little creature," he

said, abruptly, as he walked through the mud.

"I don't think I ever wish to meet with a better or more noble nature. She is a ray of absolute sunshine in that poor woman's life. Her love for her mother passes love—it has always been devotion. Nature has certainly been bountiful to Penelope Desborough. With such a face as hers a poor heart might pass muster; but hang me if I think I know which I admire the most, that girl's heart or her beauty—they are equal and most unequal." Then Dr. Westall came to a standstill. "We part here, so I'll say good-night, Mr. Latimar. By the way, I hear you have found your fate! Wish you all good things. Latimar Court will be all the better for a mistress, though it will take a long time before we get such a one as we used to have. I'm a bit old-fashioned, I am afraid, but, somehow, I cling to the things I have known and loved, and to my friends of old, dead as well as living. Your mother was an angel, Mr. Latimar; I can only hope your wife will be a little like her, and she will be a good woman and a treasure to her husband."

Denis stood in the dusk and the thin falling rain, long after Dr. Westall had vanished in the distance. What the exact purport of his thoughts was at this moment he could perhaps not have told—he felt in a numb, stupid mental condition, like one who has realised that all hope is dead, all need for struggle over.

If anyone would have told him the night before that it would be possible for him to have deeper, harder suffering to meet than that which had followed on his awakening from the mad act of jealousy he had committed, Denis would have thought that an utter impossibility; yet now he stood here in the dark, deserted lane, overwhelmed, crushed with a new grief, a new trouble, harder more difficult to bear than the worst that had come to him the night before.

A casual stranger, passing and glancing at the still, tall figure, would have taken it, perhaps, for some farmer of the neighbour-

hood lost in abstruse calculations of a financial and disheartening description. To realize that this man, whose whole form and eloquent silence was pregnant with some terrible mental trouble, was none other than the owner of Latimar Court, the rich, popular, envied Denis Latimar, would have been well-nigh an impossibility.

The picture Denis made at this moment might have been christened, not inaptly, a study of despair. Who could associate the faintest meaning of such a word with the owner of the Latimar money and estates?

There was none to propound such a question, the rain fell steadily, his horse moved now and then in an inquiring fashion, and slowly and by degrees Denis woke out of his chaos of thoughts, and braced up his flagging energy for what lay before him.

The gleam of the light from Penelope's window came to him through the trees—it was a beacon, not of hope but of courage, of will, of determination. The memory of the girl's recent act of bravery touched his heart with a thrill that recalled him to himself as by a touch of strong magnetic or electrical force.

If Penelope could be so strong in her will and courage, should he fall so far behind her? The blood rushed to his face. As he had knelt at her feet literally, so now his whole soul prostrated itself before her.

The thought came that in such a time this girl, young and weak as she was, would not falter even for an instant. The thought was a spur. With one backward glance at the window, a farewell of eyes, and heart, and soul, Denis sprang into his saddle, and rode hotly back to the Court to take up his duties as a man: to carry them through, and bear his burden unflinchingly, steadily, truly to the bitter end.

(To be continued)

It is stated that coal is only 7d. per ton at the pit mouth in China.



["AH, DO NOT BELIEVE IT!" CRIED TRAVICE; "CAPTAIN CHESHAM HAS MADE A MISTAKE!"]

BASIL'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RIFT IN THE LUTE.

A NEW era opened for Basil and Dolores in their married life, for the latter kept religiously to the programme she had marked out on that ominous night of the ball. She was polite to her husband, answered him when he spoke to her, never made any overt efforts to annoy him, and was careful to avoid either saying or doing anything that might provoke scandal. But at the same time, a thick wall had risen up between the two. "After touch of wedded hands," they were indeed "strangers yet!"

Basil, after pondering over the situation, had come to the conclusion that he could do nothing—at least at present—to alter it. He was honest with himself, and he confessed that what he was receiving was no more than what he deserved. It is true he had been led into marrying Dolores chiefly by her father's persuasions, but he would not admit this as an excuse. Nothing save love could have justified his actions, and love, alas! had been entirely out of the question when he and his bride had plighted their troth on that memorable evening of poor Verschoyle's murder. Now Nemesis had overtaken him; now that each day, each hour even, seemed to widen the gulf between him and his wife, he learned a deeper love, a truer passion than ever it had been in Eulalie Stanhope's power to teach him.

"I must wait," he said to himself, after he had wearied his brain in a vain effort to find a solution of the difficulty. "Time is the only thing that can unravel such a knot as this. One consolation I shall have, and it will consist in watching over my wife, and trying, even yet, to make her as happy as the miserable circumstances will permit."

He had not asked Dolores who had been her informant as to his past, and it never once occurred to him that Eulalie herself was the culprit. If he had suspected it, he would most assuredly have made a point of studiously avoiding her, whereas now he often found himself in her society—against his will, it is true, for it was she who sought him, not he who sought her.

She had come to him on the morning following the ball, holding out her hand with a frank open friendliness that would not allow itself to be rebuffed.

"We will let bygones be bygones, won't we Basil?" she said, with her own pretty gracious smile. "Let us forget all that has happened in the past, and start afresh as friends. We have known each other too long to become anything else, haven't we?"

He had no alternative but to accept the offer in the spirit in which it was professedly made, and so the compact was sealed, and the two remained, apparently, on the same terms as of old.

Dolores tried her best not to watch them, but she could not help seeing that they were frequently together, and so diplomatic was Miss Stanhope that she contrived to make it appear as if Basil courted her society.

"He has no sense of shame left," the young bride said to herself, very bitterly, "or surely he might spare me the constant reminder that he loves another woman."

When the heart is sore as hers was, it unconsciously turns to the sympathy it is sure of, and thus it happened that Dolores found herself relying more and more on the friendship of Pierre Lascelles. His conduct towards her was the very essence of chivalry. Never for a moment did he overstep the bounds of courteous respect, and yet on the other hand, he was always at hand when she wanted anything, always ready to bestow upon her those little services that women value so much—always kind, thoughtful, considerate.

And thus "the little rift within the lute, that by-and-by would make its music mute" widened day by day, and husband and wife drifted farther and farther apart.

About a week after the ball, Lady Chesham arranged a picnic to the ruins of an old Roman encampment, some five or six miles distant from Chesham Royal. The visitors were to drive over in open carriages and wagonettes, while the servants followed with the hampers of provisions.

At starting there had been a little discussion as to how the party should be divided. Basil was going to drive a dog-cart, and he glanced rather wistfully at his wife, who was drawing on her long tan gloves, and looking delightfully fresh and pretty in a dainty costume of pale pink cambric.

A great change had come over Dolores' dress lately, and the fact that she now looked as stylish and chic as Eulalie herself, was largely due to the influence of Miss Beatrice Risdon.

"Now Basil," said Lord Chesham, fussing up to his nephew, large and pompous, and fidgety as usual, "what fair lady is going to let you be her charioteer?"

"That I don't know. I am awaiting my orders," returned the young man.

"Like the good soldier in the presence of his commanding officer. Ha, ha!" laughed Lord Chesham, who apparently saw a joke in his own words that no one else recognised. He put up his eyeglass, and looked round. "Ah! there is Miss Risdon. What do you say to trusting yourself to my nephew, Beatrice?"

Beatrice, who would much rather have trusted herself to the young man at her side—to wit Darcy Munroe—received the proposal rather blankly.

"Wouldn't Captain Chesham rather drive his wife?" she queried.

Basil looked up quickly, a flush of grateful assent in his eyes, which, unluckily, Dolores did not see, for she was busy on the fourteenth

button of her glove, and was too interested in it even to glance up at this mention of her name.

"Husband and wife together! Pooh, pooh! can't be allowed on any consideration, can it, Dolores?"

"What did you say?" queried Dolores, who, having arranged her gloves to her satisfaction, was now at liberty to bestow some attention on the subject under discussion.

"You don't want your husband to drive you to Beacon Barrow, do you?" pursued Lord Chesham.

"Certainly not," she replied, coolly, "I hate dog-carts, nasty high things, you are in danger of being toppled out every minute."

"In that case," said Basil, nettled at her tone, "allow me to recommend the pony carriage, when your danger will be reduced to a minimum."

"That will do splendidly," commented Lord Chesham, "Mr. Lascelles is going to drive the ponies. Would you like to make a third, Miss Stanhope?"

Eulalie shrugged her shoulders.

"No, thank you," then *sotto voce*, "I'm not fond of playing gooseberry either in pony carriages or elsewhere."

Basil overheard the remark, and bit his lips hard under his moustache.

"For my part I prefer driving in a high vehicle," added Eulalie, presently, whereupon Lord Chesham at once arranged that she should go in the dog-cart, and Dolores, from her seat in the pony carriage, had the doubtful satisfaction of seeing her rival stationed radiant by her husband's side.

It was a lovely autumn morning, with a ripe mellow softness in the air. Harvest was nearly over, and the golden sheaves were stacked up together in the fields, waiting to be garnered. Down in the orchards apples were ripening, and damsons showed their dainty bloom from beneath the clustering green of their leaves, while the hedges were wreathed with the graceful sprays of the scarlet briony, and over all shone a cloudless blue sky.

"How silent you are, Basil!" said Eulalie, with a spite she could not conceal. "Was your vanity wounded by your wife's evident preference for the society of Mr. Lascelles?"

Basil's reply was to give his horse a sharp cut with the whip, which the animal resented by starting off at a mad gallop. Eulalie laughed.

"It's a good thing I am not a nervous person," she added, "or I might share Mrs. Chesham's prejudice against dog carts."

"Would you like to get down?" asked Basil, with chill politeness. "There is a vacant seat in the wagonette if you care to take it."

"No, thank you, I am all right where I am. I said if I were nervous, and I'm not, thank goodness!"

But her brow contracted all the same under the rebuff, and her little white teeth set themselves firmly together in a way that gave an absolutely vicious expression to her face.

If ever the time came when she could further pay off old scores against Basil and his wife, she would most assuredly not fail to avail herself of it!

"I have done something in that line already!" she said to herself, thinking of her interview with Dolores, "and it will go hard with me if I don't find another opportunity of completing what is begun."

The luncheon was spread on the turf, under the shade of an old tree at the top of the hill—a tree all bent to one side by the force of the wind, with a huge mis-shapen trunk that looked as if it had been tortured out of all likeness to itself.

The meal was a very merry one, as all pianos should be. Light laughter, and lighter jokes rang out to the accompaniment of the popping of champagne corks. Young voices babbled on, tossing little witticisms from one to the other as their owners discussed lobster salad and Strasbourg pâté, or trifled daintily with crimson-cheeked peaches. Beatrice Ris-

don and Darcy Munroe by a singular coincidence that was by no means unusual, were seated side by side, and in their vicinity the laughter was loudest, the jokes were more frequent. By-and-by they were quarrelling over a chicken's merry-thought to which both laid claim, and the squabble was finally settled amicably by the suggestion that they should pull the bone asunder and see which should be married first.

"All right, said Darcy, putting the merry-thought away in his pocket, "we will wait till after luncheon, then."

Beatrice looked at him suspiciously. Why couldn't he leave the thing where it was, lying on the tablecloth?

However, by-and-by the two young people strolled off a little way from the others, as is the fashion of picnicers, and the important ceremony took place.

To Beatrice's intense disgust the bone snapped off in the middle, leaving her a piece exactly the same size as Darcy's.

"What a sell!" she exclaimed, "it's my opinion the original owner of that merry-thought suffered from rheumatic gout, and that's what's made his joints so brittle."

"Nothing of the sort," returned Darcy, unblushingly. "Don't you see what this means?"

She shook her head, and he found it necessary to come a little nearer in order to explain the matter to her.

"Why, as we both have pieces the same length, it follows that we both shall be married the same time. Now do you see?"

"I see that you are a villain of despatch dye!" she retorted, half laughing, half angry.

"Why?" with an expression of injured innocence.

"Because, while I supposed the wretched thing was reposing peacefully in your pocket, you were busy 'faking' it."

"Oh Miss Risdon! Do you really believe me capable of this?"

"Of this, and many other things quite as dreadful. Your morals, Mr. Munroe, leave very much to be desired, let me tell you."

"Well, will you take me in hand and improve them? I assure you I have it in me to become a pattern of all the virtues, if somebody would only take the trouble to give me a few lessons."

"Ask one of your sisters."

"I am afraid neither of them would be quite up to the case," he answered, gravely. "They are a great deal too frivolous themselves. Now if you—"

But Beatrice put her hand to her ears, and ran away, laughing, while he followed. Presently they came to the outskirts of a wood, where the leaves were beginning to show signs of autumn in the scarlet and gold with which they were painted. As yet, however, few of them had fallen, and the moss that carpeted the ground was still soft and springy, and green as emeralds.

"Look!" exclaimed Beatrice, excitedly, pointing to a thin column of smoke that rose a little way in front. "There is a gipsy kettle on a tripod, which means there are gipsies close at hand. How delightful! Now we can have our fortunes told."

She quickened her footsteps, and by the time they reached the fire, which was composed of dried sticks, the bent form of an old woman had hobbled to meet them—evidently one of the gipsies. She was not a particularly pleasing specimen of her tribe, and what little of her face was visible looked dirty and repulsive.

Matted grey hair fell over her forehead and down her cheeks, and on it was set a bonnet of arabic type, which poked forward and overshadowed her features. Her attire consisted of a rusty black skirt, and a shawl knotted across her chest.

"Shall I tell you your fortune, my pretty lady?" she croaked. "Cross the poor

gipsy's hand with silver, and she'll tell you what the stars say."

Beatrice put her hand in her pocket to find her purse, when Darcy said in a low tone,—

"I wouldn't have anything to do with her if I were you. I don't like the look of her myself. One of my sisters once had her fortune told by an old hag just like this one, and you never heard such a tissue of horrors as she prophesied. Poor Ethel, she was miserable for a month after!"

Softly as the words were spoken, the gipsy must have overheard them, for into her bright dark eyes there came a flash of vindictiveness.

"Ah! she exclaimed, coming nearer, "you are afraid of the gipsy's knowledge young man! You think she will tell truths to the lady of the ruddy locks, into whose ears you have whispered your love vows—truths that you would wish to hide if you could."

Munroe's face flashed angrily.

"Don't flatter yourself, old mother," he returned, slightly, "it's out of your power to say anything that could do me harm, though I have no doubt you can tell lies by the dozen."

"Is it? Then what of the dark-eyed girl from over the water, who has come from her far-off home for the purpose of marrying you? What of the summons that your father sent you, not so many hours ago, to return to the girl with all speed? What of these, I say?"

Darcy looked, as he felt, perfectly dumb-founded, while the old creature lifted one skinny forefinger, and shook it menacingly in his face.

"You old witch!" he gasped, "How in the name of all that is wonderful did you learn this?"

She broke into a peal of uncanny laughter.

"How did I learn it? That is my secret. Perhaps in future you'll be more ready to respect the wisdom of the stars. Now go your way. My lips are closed. I speak with you no more."

She hobbled to the fire, and seating herself on a log of wood in front of it, held her hands over the blaze, without vouchsafing one other glance in the direction of the very discomfited man and maiden, who thereupon turned round, and retraced their steps.

"Well, of all the ram goes," began Darcy, emphatically, as soon as they were out of hearing, "I'm blest if I can make head or tail out of it."

"And yet what the old woman said was concise enough," observed Beatrice, drily.

Her tone struck him. He turned and looked at her, earnestly, though not without some slight embarrassment in his face.

"You don't mean to say you are going to pay any attention to what that old hag said?" he exclaimed, whereupon Beatrice stood still and faced him.

"True or not—you didn't deny her statement."

Darcy looked extremely foolish, and began drawing vague geometrical patterns on the grass at his feet. He felt himself in a dilemma, and more than that, his own stupidity was in a great measure answerable for it.

"Is there such a girl as she described—one who has come over the sea to wed you?" demanded Beatrice, authoritatively, though not without a suspicion of a quiver in her voice.

"Let me explain—" he began, but she interrupted him quickly.

"I don't want any explanation. A simple 'yes' or 'no' is all sufficient—and I think your manner answers my question. Yet one more—did you have a letter this morning from your father, summoning you home, as the gipsy said?"

"I did—though how the deuce she knew it, passes my comprehension. But Miss Risdon—Beatrice—I implore you to listen to me, only for a few moments."

She shook off the entreating hand he laid on her arm, and even forced herself to laugh, though Heaven only knew how sore her heart was, poor girl!

"But I don't want to listen to you, Mr. Monroe. I have no sort of interest in what you may say. All I wanted to find out was whether the gipsy spoke the truth or not; and now that I am assured she did, my curiosity is satisfied. Don't trouble yourself to explain; indeed, there is nothing for you to explain."

She held her pretty head very high, and hurried on in front so as to give him no chance of repeating his importunities, while all the time she was saying in her heart,—

"The wretch! To come making love to me when he was engaged to another girl, and never to say a word about her! I deserve he has been flattering himself all the time that he has made a conquest of me. But I'll teach him better! I'll let him see that he's not the invincible Adonis he fancies himself; yes, even if my heart breaks over the lesson!"

She was a proud, impulsive, headstrong little person, letting her feelings guide her pretty much where they would, and sometimes their guidance had been rather questionable. On more than one occasion Miss Beatrice had performed the feat known as "knocking her head against a stone wall," and even yet experience had failed to teach her that the wall was a good deal harder than her cranium!

Fate was against Darcy, for, before he could overtake the young girl, a sudden turn in the path disclosed Dolores and Lascelles entering idly along, and to them Beatrice immediately imparted the astounding fact that a little farther on in the wood was a gipsy who could actually read both past and future!

"We must go and see her," said Lascelles, smiling, "anything for a new sensation. Come, Mrs. Cheesham, and you shall have your fortune told."

CHAPTER XIV. THE FINGER OF FATE.

The gipsy was sitting in the same position, half crouching over the fire, and she made no effort to rise as Lascelles and Dolores approached. A close observer might have noticed however, that she shot one swift keen glance at the pair from under her lowered eye-lids, as she pulled forward the old poke bonnet that did so much to throw her face into shadow.

"Come," said Lascelles, holding out a florin, "what pretty things are you going to tell this young lady, good mother?"

"None, while there is a listener near," replied the crone, harshly, whereupon Lascelles laughingly retreated out of ear-shot, though he remained near enough to act as a protector in case Dolores needed one.

The gipsy took the young girl's hand with unexpected gentleness, and bent down over it to study the lines that crossed and recrossed the pink palm.

"The line of life is long and unbroken," she muttered in an undertone, "but over the line of fortune are many crosses. You are in trouble, pretty one, like a bird that is kept in its cage by a cruel jaller, and longs, while it beats its wings against the gilded wires, for the blessing of liberty."

Dolores could not repress a start. Before she had time to say anything, the woman continued,—

"But all the same, let not despair lay her icy hand upon you. Remember that dawn is near when the night is darkest. You have by your side a faithful friend whose office it is to watch over you, and who would protect you from harm with life itself. The stars have decreed that the storm shall herald in happy future. The dark cloud that threatens you shall pass away, and all shall be well with you. Now tell your companion to draw nigh."

She made a slight gesture of dismissal, as if to end the interview.

"Well!" exclaimed Lascelles, "has she promised you all the gifts that Heaven can bestow?"

"Very nearly," the young girl responded, soberly. "Now it is your turn."

"I don't think I'll tempt Fate."

"Oh, but you must! The gipsy said you were to, and I shall wait very impatiently until I have heard the result."

Thus urged, Lascelles went slowly to the fire, and once more tendered his silver, which the old hag slipped into a leathern pouch she wore round her waist. Then she took his hand, and regarded it intently for some moments.

"Sorrow and shame in the past, sorrow and shame in the future," she muttered. "The shadow of a crime lies upon you. It dogs your footsteps, and haunts your dreams by night and by day. You have set out on a vain quest, and the end of it will mock you. In your heart has grown up a vain hope, and that will mock you, too. Have the stars said aught?"

Lascelles had grown very pale. He snatched his hand roughly away, and looked searchingly into the old creature's face.

"Who are you, woman?" he demanded sternly, "and from whence do you get your knowledge?"

"From the heavens themselves—and they never deceive me. They have sent you a warning through me. Leave this place where you are now sojourning, and hide yourself where the bloodhounds cannot reach you. They are on your track. Do you understand?"

She spoke in a low but clear whisper—indeed her voice had never risen above a whisper during the whole of their colloquy—and it seemed as if to him her words were full of significance.

Once more he looked at her piercingly, but her eyes were lowered, and the straggling gray hair concealed a good deal of her face. What he saw baffled him.

"Again I ask you—who are you?" he queried, in a breathless undertone. "Such knowledge as you evidently possess does not come by accident."

"Nor is its secret to be imparted," she replied, imperiously. "I have spoken. It is for you to act."

She fumbled about in her pouch, and produced a short, and extremely filthy clay pipe, into which she rammed some tobacco. Then, leaning over the fire, she lighted it, and began smoking, with perfect equanimity.

Lascelles hesitated, and seemed once more on the point of speaking, when Dolores, tired of waiting, and apparently judging from the gipsy's attitude that the fortune-telling was over, came up with a smile, and an inquiry as to what his fate was to be.

He did not reply quite immediately, but turned back with her, and together they went on towards the interior of the wood.

"How very grave you are!" she exclaimed. "The gipsy must have been telling you something of terrific importance."

"She has startled me, I admit."

"By her guesses at the past or future?"

"Both," he answered, knitting his brows together. "The woman must be an impostor, and yet, how in the name of Heaven, did she manage to guess so well!"

On this point Dolores was powerless to give him any information, and they walked on for some distance in silence, while Lascelles seemed lost in deep thought.

Whatever the gipsy had said, Dolores decided, had made a very great impression on him, and she was not without some womanly curiosity regarding it.

Presently they came to a fallen trunk of a tree, all overgrown with moss and ferns, and here they seated themselves.

"I am glad I have an opportunity for speaking to you alone," said Lascelles, after one glance round to assure himself there was no danger of eavesdroppers, "for I have something to say to you that may surprise you. I leave Cheesham Royal to-night."

"That does surprise me," returned Dolores; "but I really don't see any reason for solitude in order for you to break such a fact to me."

There was a slight tone of hauteur in her voice, and she drew a little away from him as she spoke.

"You mistake me!" exclaimed Lascelles, quickly. "I did not for one moment suppose that the fact of my presence or absence would make any difference to you, but I wanted to make a request that you may possibly think borders on presumption, and, before making it, I desire to assure you that I do it with feelings of the most respectful friendship man ever entertained towards woman."

"And your request?"

He hesitated, and a flush rose to his pale face.

"It is this," he said at last, "that if ever you are in trouble or difficulty—if anything unforeseen happens, and I can be of any service to you, you will send for me. I know this seems a strange thing to say, but a time may come when you may care to remember it, and, believe me, I am actuated by the most sincere regard for your welfare. My interest in you is no ordinary one—as you would confess if you knew all."

"What do you mean?" she asked, startled.

"That I cannot tell you at present. Let it suffice that I have very good reasons for keeping silence. Will you grant me what I ask?"

After a minute's consideration she assented, and he tore a leaf from his pocket book, and hastily wrote a few lines on it.

"There!" he said, giving it to her, "that address will always find me. Now I am more at ease. I thank you for your confidence in me."

Saying which, he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

The action was unfortunately timed, for at that very minute Captain Cheesham and Enlalie, followed at a distance by half-a-dozen others, came into sight.

"What a pretty picture!" exclaimed Enlalie, satirically. "It is really a pity to disturb Phyllis and Corydon—especially as Phyllis seems so very much confused at our appearance. Had we better turn back do you think?"

Some extremely unparliamentary language rose to Basil's lips, but by an effort he crushed it back. After all, it would not do to create a scene before these people—but he would make it his business to have it out with Lascelles later on.

"Foreigners think nothing of kissing a lady's hand—with them, it is merely an action of politeness," he rejoined lightly.

"But is Mr. Lascelles a foreigner?"

"I believe so. He looks like one, at any rate."

"Yes, but he speaks like an Englishman."

"Perhaps he was educated in England."

"In that case, kissing ladies' hands wouldn't have formed part of his education," returned Enlalie, with a malicious pleasure in having got the better of the argument.

"I think we had better go back now," observed Lady Cheesham, coming up with a fatigued air. She was rather fond of posing as an invalid. "I am sure by the time we reach Beacon Barrow, we shall all be ready for a cup of tea. What do you say, Dolores?"

"I say yes," Dolores returned, jumping up from her seat, and walking by Lady Cheesham's side. "By the way, did you have your fortune told?"

"No. Was there anyone to tell it?"

"Why, yes, the most professional-looking old witch in the world. Did you not see her?"

Lady Cheesham replied in the negative, adding—

"If I had done so, I should certainly have got her to tell me my fortune. I had it told when I was a girl, and the woman said I should be married, which, as I was not even engaged then, showed that she knew more than ordinary people, didn't it?"

Dolores laughed. She was not sure that such a prediction, made to a good-looking young girl, argued any definite occult knowledge.

"Well, you'll have a chance as we go back," she observed, consolingly, "for the gipsy is sure to be there."

But she was wrong, as the event proved. The fire still smouldered; but no old crone kept guard over it, and although one or two of the young men of the party, incited by Lady Chesham, made a thorough search, they could not even find a trace of the woman, who had disappeared as completely as if she had never been.

"Oh! I am so sorry!" exclaimed her frivolous little ladyship, who had really been looking forward to some excitement. "Here is a gamekeeper. Let us ask him if he has seen her."

The gamekeeper was interrogated, and not only denied having seen the woman in question, but declared there had been no encampment of gipsies about the wood for a long time.

"I won't have dealings with no such vermin," he added, scornfully, in conclusion. "If I catches 'em I marches 'em up before the nearest magistrate, and he gives 'em what for."

"What for?" asked Beatrice Risdon, quickly, and every one laughed at the joke except Darcy Munroe, who was lingering in the background looking the very essence of melancholy.

As soon as tea was over, the horses were put in, and the picnicers drove home, not however in the same order as they had come, for now Beatrice and Dolores were with Lady Chesham in the Victoria, and by some freak of chance Eulalie found herself in the pony-carriage with Lascelles, who was very quiet, and seemed lost in meditation during the whole of the drive.

That same evening he left Chesham Royal, alleging, as an excuse, business of importance which called him to London. So Basil was cheated of the "talk" he had promised himself.

CHAPTER XV.

BASIL LETS HIMSELF BE PERSUADED.

The next morning Lady Chesham declared herself so tired by the unusual amount of exercise she had taken the day before that it would be quite impossible for her to appear downstairs until after luncheon. Dolores therefore took her place as hostess at breakfast, and it struck her that the meal was a very silent and uncomfortable one. Both Beatrice Risdon and Darcy Munroe, usually so full of chaff and laughter, were absolutely sedate.

Lord Chesham, having heard from the nurse that his baby had refused his bottle that morning, was gravely pondering over the meaning of this extraordinary phenomenon; and Basil hardly answered, even when he was addressed.

In point of fact the young man was intensely miserable, and the worst part of his misery lay in the fact that he saw no way out of it. Half the night he had paced backwards and forwards in his dressing-room, recalling to mind that scene he had witnessed in the wood, and pondering what steps he could take in the matter, or whether he had not better ignore it altogether now that Lascelles had left the house.

During breakfast his wife never once addressed him, and after the meal was over he followed Lord Chesham into the library, where that noble peer intended seeking in a "book of domestic medicine" for the cause of his heir's reprehensible conduct.

"Lascelles left rather suddenly, didn't he?" asked the young man, striving to speak in a careless manner.

"Very suddenly indeed. Never was so surprised in my life as when he came to wish me good-bye last night. I thought he would be here for another week at least."

"Then you knew nothing of his intention to leave until after we came home from the picnic?"

"Nothing at all. Said he had important business in London, and must catch the night mail. Very curious behaviour, I call it."

Basil remained thoughtfully silent for a few minutes, then he said,—

"By the way, uncle, how did you make this Mr. Lascelles' acquaintance?"

"Through Devigne — you remember Devigne, don't you?"

"Do you mean the traveller, Devigne—the man who is always scampering across Africa, or scaling the Andes, or up to some such fool's tricks?"

"That's the chap. Haven't seen much of him of late years, but was up at Cambridge with him, and we have kept up a desultory sort of correspondence ever since. Well, he wrote to me and asked me to invite Lascelles down here. It seems Lascelles was writing a book on English home life, and Devigne said he couldn't find a more typical English mansion to describe than Chesham Royal. So I at once asked the fellow here."

"Ah!" said Basil, drawing a long breath, "I fancied it was something of that sort. My own impression, uncle, is that this Lascelles is a mere adventurer."

"Good Heaven, Basil, you don't say so!" exclaimed Lord Chesham, to whom the word adventurer conveyed no definite idea, save as regarded the silver. "I wonder if the spoons are all right. I must really go and ask Dawkins"—Dawkins was the butler—"to count them at once."

He trotted off, and, as he disappeared, Basil went to the window and gazed out with unseeing eyes on the lawns before him. After all, it did not matter whether Lascelles was an adventurer or not, if he had contrived to make Dolores in love with him, and this was what Basil feared had happened. Not that he for one moment mistrusted his wife, only he knew that one's affections are not under one's control, and the young girl had never attempted to disguise her preference for Lascelles' society.

Basil did not call to mind the conditions under which she had come to Chesham Royal, and how natural it was that, knowing none of the other visitors, she should turn to one whom she had at least met before. Then, too, his conviction was firm that Lascelles' only motive for coming to the house had been the desire to see Dolores again. Arguing from these premises, he finally concluded that on the preceding day Lascelles had been hurried into a declaration of passion, and as a consequence the young wife had told him he had better leave.

"I would stake my life on her purity and innocence," Chesham said to himself. "But alas for my hope of ever winning her love! It was not impossible so long as she cared for no one else, but now—"

He ended by a deep groan. The assurance that she loved Lascelles had taken too firm a hold upon him to be lightly shaken off. All he could hope was that time and absence might help to make her forget him.

Meanwhile he resolved to devote himself to Dolores' service with as much ardour as if he had been her lover instead of her husband. He would go to her this very minute, and ask her to let him take her for a walk or a drive—and that, in spite of the cavalier way in which she had refused to accompany him in the dog-cart the day before.

He went upstairs and knocked at her sitting-room door. There was no answer, and he concluded she was not within. However, to make assurance doubly sure, he opened the door, and then he paused on the threshold, uncertain whether to proceed or to quietly withdraw before she suspected his presence.

Dolores was kneeling in front of a couch, her arms extended, her face bowed, her whole attitude instinct with despair. Suddenly she raised her head, and then Basil saw she held something in her hand, a man's photograph, which she lifted to her lips and kissed passionately.

"My love—my love!" she cried, in a heart-broken whisper. Basil stayed to hear no more. As softly as he had entered, so he retreated, and went straight back to the library

again. Yes, there could be no doubt of it now. Her sense of duty had made her send Lascelles away, but it did not prevent her from passionately regretting his departure all the same.

There came a knock at the door, and a discreet cough, followed by the entrance of Dawkins.

"Beg pardon, sir, but there's a person come to see you, and he ask me to give you this envelope if you was alone, not otherways," said the butler, looking mysterious, as he held out an envelope, with Captain Chesham's name on the outside.

Inside was a card, on which a few lines were traced.

Basil read them, then said,—

"All right, Dawkins. Bring him in here. I suppose there is no danger of our interview being interrupted for the next half hour?"

"None whatever, sir. His lordship is out with Miss Stanhope, and my lady, she is not down yet. The gentlemen are mostly shooting, I believe. Anyhow, nobody's likely to come here," with a slighting glance at the book shelves, which showed that Dawkins, excellent butler though he might be, laid no claims to literary distinction.

In a few minutes a tall, slight, spare man entered the library, and in obedience to Basil's invitation took a seat opposite to him at the writing-table. His name was Osborne, and he was a detective from Scotland Yard.

In order to explain his presence, we must inform the reader that Basil had come to a sudden determination to make another attempt to penetrate the mystery of his father-in-law's death. Perhaps this resolve was in a measure due to a friend of his, who lived near Chesham Royal, telling him how a mystery in his own family had been investigated and solved by a detective named Osborne, whom he described as one of the cleverest and 'outest men he had ever met. He had given Basil this man's address, and the detective was here to-day in answer to the young man's summons.

"The case is an unusual one," Osborne said, after listening quietly to Captain Chesham's story, and jotting down sundry notes in a memorandum book that he took from his pocket. "But one thing is pretty clear, and that is that Abdul knew something about the crime."

"You think he was the murderer?"

"I don't say that. People often run away, from fright, when they are perfectly innocent, and it is on the cards that this man was not the actual murderer, and yet was more or less an accomplice. This would explain his flight. Our first endeavour must be to trace him."

"Will that be difficult?"

"It oughtn't to be, seeing that he's a man of colour, and as such would naturally attract more attention than if he'd been an Englishman. Of course he has had plenty of time to get out of the country, and perhaps he is across the sea by now. If so, there is not much hope of nabbing him. But if he's in England, the chances are in our favour. Anyhow, I'll do my best for you, sir, and it isn't often I'm beaten. There's another thing that strikes me, in this case, and it is that we ought to know something of Mr. Verschoyle's former life. No doubt that would help us a great deal."

"I have often thought that myself," returned Basil, meditatively; "but how is it possible to get at it?"

"Cannot Mrs. Chesham help us, sir?"

"Very little, I am afraid. She has told me that her father was of a very studious nature, and spent most of his time amongst his books. During the years they lived at Highgate, their life was extremely quiet. They neither went out nor received visitors, and before that they occupied an old Château in France, where they were even more secluded. Farther back than that my wife does not remember."

"That sounds queer," muttered Osborne. "If you'll excuse my saying it, sir, it seems to me there must have been something in the gentleman's past that he did not want the world to know."

"I quite agree with you."

"And," went on Osborne, "the discovery of what it was would be of very great help to us."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it. Probably this man Abdul could throw considerable light on it. Yes, I am more than ever convinced of the necessity of finding him, and also of looking up Mr. Verschoyle's past. He had bankers, I suppose?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then we might apply to them in the first instance, and so work back. Ah! what was that?"

The last few words were muttered below his breath, and were called forth by a faint sound, which might have been a stifled cough, but was so slight that ears less trained than his would have failed to distinguish it. Indeed, Basil, though quick enough as a rule, had heard nothing.

Almost before the exclamation had passed his lips, he had sprung noiselessly to his feet, and equally noiselessly flung open the door. The action was so silent, and so sudden, that it gave the person outside, who was kneeling on the mat with one ear applied to the key-hole, no time to recover her perpendicular, and thus Travice, that excellent abigail, was caught in a position that was, to say the least, somewhat compromising.

But she proved equal to the occasion, and rose slowly to her feet, without betraying any embarrassment whatever.

"Excuse me, sir, I have been fastening my shoe lace," she said. "My mistress sent me to get a novel for her, and I did not like to come in, as I heard the sound of voices, and did not know who might be inside."

"Go to your mistress's sitting-room," said Basil, with soldierly brevity. "I will speak to you there later on."

She obeyed at once, and as Basil came back into the library, the detective said,—

"Pardon me, sir, but who is that?"

"My wife's maid."

"Then your wife has got a very clever maid," observed Osborne, drily. "The woman was clearly eavesdropping, but from her manner no one would have suspected it. Has she been with Mrs. Chesham long?"

"Not very long—about two months perhaps."

"And she came well recommended I suppose?"

"I expect so, otherwise my wife would not have engaged her. But why do you ask?"

"Because there is something in the woman's manner that has struck me. She is by no means an ordinary lady's maid. If I were you, sir, I should keep a pretty sharp look-out on her goings on."

Soon after this, Osborne took his leave, and then Basil went upstairs to his wife's boudoir, where he found Dolores half reclining on a couch, her face still pale, and her eyes showing traces of recent tears.

Travice was quietly tidying up the room, which was conspicuously littered with sketching materials, fancy work, and loose sheets of music, all of which had been thrown aside by the young mistress of the apartment almost before she had had time to look at them. Evidently she was in a restless, irritable mood, as evinced by the impatient tapping of one scarlet rosetted, slipped foot on the ground.

"What is the matter," she asked, quickly, as her husband entered. "Travice came up without the book I sent her to fetch, and said you would follow soon, and explain why she had not brought it. Has anything happened?" looking from one to the other.

"Something has happened, and I am come to acquaint you with it," her husband replied.

"The fact is, I found your maid listening, or trying to listen, at the library door, and as this is the second time I have had cause to suspect her, it seems to me that the sooner you dismiss her the better."

"Captain Chesham is mistaken, ma'am!" exclaimed Travice, addressing her mistress. "As I told him, my shoe lace had come un-

done, and I was kneeling down to fasten it. It is true I remained outside the door a little while, but that was only because I did not like disturbing him and the person who was with him."

"What person was it?" demanded Dolores.

"Only someone come to see me on business," answered Basil, who did not wish to recall painful memories to his wife by telling her the nature of Osborne's transactions. "As for such an excuse as that—it is absurd on the face of it! I don't like having about me people I can't trust; and the long and short of it is, Travice must go."

Travice, with a sudden movement of abandon, flung herself at her mistress's feet.

"Ah, do not believe it!" she cried, vehemently. "Captain Chesham has made a mistake, and I must be its victim. Don't send me away, dear lady! I love you better than anyone in the wide world. I would lay down my life for your happiness. Why then should I be torn from you?"

There was a ring of genuine emotion in the woman's voice—there was real passion in her gestures. Whatever her faults might be, there could at least be no doubt of her devotion to her mistress.

The tears sprang to Dolores' eyes. Affection always touched her.

"Is it not possible that you are mistaken?" she asked her husband, imploringly.

He shook his head.

"No, it is not. Perhaps if this had been the only time I had cause to suspect the woman, I might give her the benefit of the doubt! But it is not so."

Travice turned upon him swiftly.

"You are not fair to me, sir. You took a prejudice against me the very first time you saw me, and it has strengthened every day since."

It was a bold thing to say, but it was true nevertheless, and Basil made no attempt to deny it.

"I have not let my prejudice stand in the way of my judgment," he replied.

"Indeed, sir, but that is just what you have done—without knowing, it may be. Ask my mistress if I have not served her faithfully ever since I came to her—ask her if she is not sure of my devotion! I tell you, sir, if you send me away, it will be an act of cruelty to her and to me, for she may search a long time before she finds another servant who will serve her so loyally."

In spite of his careless good nature, there was in Basil a certain fund of determination that made it difficult to move him, once he had made up his mind. He could be stern enough when he liked, and in this instance he saw no alternative but sternness; for he was a man of strict honour, to whom the idea of having a spy in his household was especially abhorrent.

"All that you urge may be true—I do not question your devotion to your mistress—but all the same I insist on your leaving."

Travice turned with dumb appeal to Dolores, and the young girl could not withstand the voiceless anguish in her face.

"At least you will not send her away at once—you will grant her a respite?" she said.

"If you are sure of what you saw, I can't ask you altogether to overlook it, but there is surely no necessity for Travice to leave till the end of the month, and then we shall be returning to London, and there will be no scandal, as there would be if you were to turn her off at a moment's notice from this house. I ask you as a personal favour to myself to let her remain till then."

Poor Basil! He was placed in a very awkward position. It was hard on him to have to refuse this first request of his wife, and yet he felt that to grant it would be weak in the extreme.

He hesitated, and Dolores, seeing her opportunity, pressed her point with truly feminine insistence. Finally he yielded.

"Very well, it shall be as you wish. I only

hope you may not regret it, but I have an assurance that you will do so," he said, as he left the room.

Prophetic words! He who uttered them little thought how terribly they would be verified.

(To be continued.)

THE RAVENDALE MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST BLAST.

THE *Chorlton Daily Trumpet*, in its issue of Tuesday, February 3rd, 188—, contained the following paragraph:—

"SUDDEN DEATH OF SIR RICHARD RAVENDALE.

"It is our painful duty to record the death of Sir Richard Ravendale, Bart., which occurred last evening at his residence Ravendale Hall. On entering the library shortly after seven o'clock, the deceased baronet's valet found his master lying on the floor of the apartment in a state of unconsciousness, as he supposed, but, upon the arrival of Doctor Parr of Cheselden, who was immediately summoned, life was declared to be extinct, the cause of death being heart-disease. As the baronet was unmarried, the title and estate devolve upon his step-brother, Mr. Philip Ravendale. We understand that no arrangements have been made as yet with regard to the funeral. The deceased was in his 52nd year."

In its issue of the following day, the *Chorlton Daily Trumpet* further recorded that the funeral was fixed for Friday morning at ten o'clock, and also that Mr., now Sir Philip, Ravendale had arrived at Ravendale Hall from London.

The *Chorlton Daily Trumpet* intended to blaze forth in a full account of the funeral in its Saturday's issue. Indeed, the *Trumpet* man to whose pen the world was to be indebted for the said account, had already written half of it—the biographical half, dilating upon the "noble qualities of the departed baronet" and upon the "wide spread feeling of sympathy and regret;" the remainder was left over to be filled in from personal observation of the obsequies.

Alas! both the *Trumpet* and its man were forcibly reminded of a certain warning concerning the counting of unwatched chickens; for when Friday morning came, and the vast concourse, including most of the nobility and gentry of Middlesbrough, assembled to pay a last tribute, the unheard-of announcement was made that there was to be no funeral!

No funeral? And some of the nobility and gentry had come twenty miles! No funeral? And the vast concourse had run the risk of coughs, colds, chest and lung-diseases, rheumatisms, perhaps its own funeral by venturing out on this bleak February morning, with its continuous drizzle of rain and cutting easterly wind, that made every man look as if he had a cherry stuck in the middle of his face instead of a nose. No funeral! Well, surely, there is a breakfast prepared for us, said the nobility and gentry. Surely there is cold beef and ale in the servants' hall, said the rest of the vast concourse. But there was no hint of any sort of compensation. The big entrance gates were locked, and the two men who stood inside them, for the purpose of informing everyone that arrived to turn back by the way he had come—these heartless and non-committal janitors merely said there was to be no funeral; they did not know the reason for the extraordinary omission—or they said they didn't. They had heard no mention of breakfast or beef and ale. Their sole mission was to stand within the gates and tell those who stood outside that there would be no funeral. Why? They could not tell. When was it to be? They could not tell that either.

One of them hazarded the remark that Mr. Treble, the undertaker, might be able to answer this latter question. Mr. Treble's undertaking and posting establishment, however, was in Chorlton, five miles off; and, as the vast concourse was not composed of women, its curiosity was not great enough to induce it to cover the distance in the face of such weather.

Those of the nobility and gentry whose homeward ways led through Chorlton High Street, determined to stop at Mr. Treble's, and obtain from him, if possible, some explanation of the turn affairs had taken. The rest must wait till such explanation should leak out, as it doubtless would before many hours.

With not a few audible imprecations hurled indiscriminately at the janitors, at the weather, at circumstance, at the name of Ravendale, at the absence of breakfast and beef and ale, the vast concourse turned away from the inhospitable gates and set its face homeward.

There was one man to whom this turn of affairs brought joy, and that was the *Trumpet* man. His mind saw in it opportunities; his clear and perspicacious judgment at once scented mystery—and mystery is the delight of the journalistic soul. He never gave a thought to the time he had spent over his half-prepared account of Sir Richard Ravendale's funeral; he had soared far into the realms of startling intelligence. "The Ravendale mystery. Postponement of the funeral. Suspicious circumstances." What headlines for the columns of the *Trumpet*!

He worked indefatigably all that day and far into the next night, in order to elicit the reasons for the non-fulfilment of the obsequial arrangements; and, as a result of his investigations, the following extraordinary information was imparted to readers of the *Chorlton Daily Trumpet* of Saturday the 7th of February:—

THE DEATH OF SIR RICHARD RAVENDALE. A STARTLING DISCOVERY. WAS IT MURDER?

"An unlooked for discovery has been made in connection with the death of Sir Richard Ravendale, which, as has previously been announced in our columns, took place on Monday last. The funeral, fixed for yesterday morning, has been postponed pending inquiries, the discovery having led to a strong suspicion of foul play.

"It appears that, when two of the employees of Mr. Treble, the well-known undertaker of this town, were about to place the late Baronet's remains in the coffin on Thursday evening, they found marks on the neck which plainly point to strangulation as the cause of death, instead of heart disease, as was believed.

"That Dr. Parr failed to notice this when he saw the body on Monday evening is doubtless attributable to the fact that these external evidences of violence may not then have been so visible as they have since become, and also to his knowledge of the existence of cardiac weakness in the deceased, whose medical attendant he had been for many years.

"When the new features in the case were brought under his notice he expressed considerable surprise and declared himself completely at a loss to account for his oversight. A theory, that has gained ground in the Ravendale household, is, that the late Baronet's dog, which was found lying beside the body on Wednesday evening, may have leaped upon it in order to obtain the recognition it had looked for in vain.

"The police, however, attach no importance to this supposition, in spite of the fact that it can be upheld by various proofs. They are extremely reticent on the subject, but it is understood that some important disclosures will be forthcoming at the inquest, which is to be held this afternoon at three o'clock. Up to an early hour this morning nothing could

be ascertained that might throw any clearer light on the mystery, but the opinion is pretty general that the theory of murder is alone tenable, and with this opinion we unhesitatingly agree."

Thus did the *Chorlton Daily Trumpet* sound the first blast that heralded in the most extraordinary case in modern criminal records—a case which has resulted in a series of revelations that can scarce be paralleled outside the pages of Gaborian, thus furnishing one more demonstration of the fact that truth is stranger than fiction.

CHAPTER II.

THE FINGER OF SUSPICION.

LONG before three o'clock, the hour fixed for the inquest, there was not a vacant seat in the big dining-room at Ravendale Hall, excepting, of course, those reserved for the coroner and jury.

Neither was there a theory, possible or the reverse, that might throw some light on the strange discovery made by Mr. Treble's employees, which had not been started and discussed by the assembled crowd.

Every shred of information, reliable or otherwise, had duly undergone that remarkable process of transformation in the course of its passing from lip to lip, until, like a tree that is completely hidden beneath the ivy that has grown upon it, the original statement was lost sight of in the mass of exaggeration that had attached to it.

The *Trumpet* man and the *Middleshire Express* man, who glared at each other from the opposite top corners of the long oak table, might have found material for startling paragraphs, had they set down for truth what they heard around them.

The noise in the room resembled nothing so much as that which might proceed from a huge bee-hive, conversation being, for the most part, carried on in half-whispers rather than in tones of distinct utterance. The effect of such whispered conversation was to stimulate curiosity and expectation by deepening the impression of mystery.

The servants of the household made a distinct group, characterised by silence; not that they were not interested in the occasion, but they had a vague terror of being called as witnesses. The thought of standing up before that gaping crowd struck a chill to the heart of each one of them.

The cook, who was the central figure of the group, mopped her forehead every moment with the corner of her apron, and graphically described her sufferings by saying she was "that 'ot she might be a roastin' in the hoven."

Albert Hirsch, the late Baronet's valet, was the only one of them all who seemed quite at his ease. He had travelled a good deal, and had, consequently, a far-reaching experience of men and things, which caused him to treat the ups and downs of life with a sort of stoical indifference.

Near the door sat Dr. Parr and Mr. Arthur Wyndham, a young man who had formerly acted in the capacity of tutor to George Blake, one of the late Baronet's two wards.

In the doctor and in the ex-tutor a good deal of interest centred, since they were, both of them, important witnesses. Mr. Wyndham was the last person known to have seen Sir Richard Ravendale alive.

A couple of plain-clothes officers from the Chorlton police force stood against the wall between the door and the sideboard, looking eminently contented with themselves, and eminently discontented with the Scotland-yard detective, who had arrived an hour before, and who seemed to treat the matter with an utter lack of interest. He sat idly toying with his pocket-knife, the blade of which he kept opening and shutting with a click. The Chorlton men looked at each other as much as to say that such a do-nothing might have saved himself the trouble of coming.

Precisely at three o'clock a whisper went round the room that the jury were viewing the body in the library. There was an instantaneous lull in the conversation. Everyone settled him or herself in his or her seat, and put on an air of solemn anticipation. The cook gave her forehead a more vigorous mopping, and Albert Hirsch relaxed in his attitude of indifference so far as to twist his moustache ends tightly. The Chorlton police straightened themselves and folded their arms in a business-like fashion. Only Fricker, the Scotland-yard detective, made no change in his demeanour and occupation, but continued to click the blade of his knife, and did not finally close it till the coroner and jury entered the room and took their places, the coroner at the foot of the table, and his jurymen in two rows, one at either side.

After them came Dr. Edden, of Chorlton, who had made the *post mortem* examination, in conjunction with Dr. Parr, Mr. Manvers, the family lawyer, and Sir Philip Ravendale, the new baronet, who formally identified the body as that of his stepbrother.

Of course he was not in a position to give any evidence, having been in London when the death took place, and having only arrived at Ravendale Hall on the subsequent day.

Dr. Parr was first called. His evidence may be given in brief, although, as a matter-of-fact, he was far more long-winded and discursive than any other of the witnesses.

The coroner, on account of professional etiquette, did not attempt to pull him up short, besides, he knew very well that the only way to arrive at anything through Dr. Parr was to let him ramble on in his own fashion.

He said that on Monday evening at about a quarter before eight o'clock he was summoned to the Hall, but found, when he arrived, that Sir Richard Ravendale had already expired. The deceased had for years suffered from cardiac weakness, and, knowing this, he was not greatly surprised at the suddenness of the death.

He was aware that his professional reputation was at stake, but in spite of appearances, he was prepared to assert that the conclusion at which he had arrived on first seeing the body was correct, and that cardiac weakness and nothing else was the cause of death. Had there been evidence of strangulation he could not have failed to notice it, as the clothing about the neck had been loosened. He was not near-sighted; he had given heart-disease as the cause of death in the certificate. He remained about an hour at the hall on Monday evening. He did not attempt to administer restoratives. Sir Richard was dead, so it would have been useless. He believed the housekeeper had tried to do so. He did not see the body again until Thursday night, when a messenger from the Hall brought word that his presence was required immediately. Sir Philip met him in the vestibule, and told him what Mr. Treble's man had discovered.

He saw the marks on the neck. They were such as would result from strangulation. The housekeeper was in the library, and told him something about a dog, to which he paid no attention. He was too much astonished to listen. He did not think it possible for such marks to have remained invisible after they had been inflicted. A slight bruise often leaves no mark for some hours; but these marks appeared to have resulted from considerable violence, and would, in all likelihood, have shown at once, though the discolouration which now appeared would not perhaps be evident so soon.

He had assisted Dr. Edden in the *post-mortem* examination, which did not alter his opinion as to the true cause of death. He was not prepared to offer any explanation of the presence of those marks—indeed, he confessed himself fairly puzzled by them.

After answering one or two unimportant questions, put to him by an inquisitive jurymen, Dr. Parr sat down. To the coroner's mind his evidence was most unsatisfactory, it led to nothing definite.

Dr. Edden was next called. His evidence was brief and to the point. He asserted his opinion without starting any theories or combating any suggestions. He was determined to confine himself to what he knew from personal observation. He said,—

"I made a post-mortem examination of the body yesterday, in conjunction with Dr. Parr. I found five contused marks on the neck. They had been produced by a pressure sufficient to cause death by asphyxiation. The lips were discoloured, and the pupils of the eyes were dilated. I found no evidence of disease in any part of the body excepting a slight derangement of one of the valves of the heart, which might or might not have been sufficient to cause death under certain conditions."

"As, for instance?" put in the coroner.

"Over-exertion or a very great shock to mind or body," replied Dr. Edden, at once. "The heart was certainly in a weak condition but not actually diseased. The body did not appear to me to have been dead above two or three days, as there was no sign of decomposition having set in; but this is a fact which I attribute to the healthy condition of the body, and partly, too, to climatic conditions. The story of the dog having been found lying by the body, and being, therefore, a possible agent in the infliction of those marks, has been put before me. I find, however, that such a theory is untenable in the face of the shape and position of the marks themselves. One appears on the right hand side of the gullet, the other four are in a semi-perpendicular row on the left side. They could only have been caused by the thumb and four fingers of the human hand. To my mind there is no doubt whatever that the immediate cause of death was asphyxia."

This concluded the medical evidence. Dr. Edden retired with a bow to the coroner, and Mr. Arthur Wyndham was called.

"Your name?" inquired the coroner, to whom he was not personally known.

"Arthur Percival Wyndham."

"Your occupation?"

"I have none at present," he replied, with evident regret. "I was a student at the University of Oxford until my father, who was the rector of Chesham, died. After that I was, for a short time, tutor to George Blake, one of Sir Richard Ravendale's wards."

"I see," said the coroner, in a tone of sympathy. He divined the truth that the young man was the victim of altered circumstances. "For how long a time did you act as tutor?" he asked.

"For about three months in the autumn of last year."

"Did you reside in the house?"

"No, I came at ten every morning and remained until seven. I live with my mother at Woodbine Cottage."

The coroner had put these last two questions with the view of finding out whether the young man was likely to know much about Ravendale Hall and its inmates.

"I believe," he now went on, "that you are the last person known to have seen Sir Richard Ravendale alive. Is this so?"

"Yes, I last saw him about six o'clock on Monday evening."

"As it is of the utmost importance to try and fix the time at which the murder—if murder it be, and I think after the evidence of Dr. Edden, we can hardly believe otherwise—was committed, I must ask you to give me some proof that the hour you mention is correct."

"I came to call upon Sir Richard Ravendale at half-past five. I cannot say for certain how long I remained with him; but I reached Woodbine Cottage at a quarter past six, and it usually takes me fifteen minutes to walk home from here."

"Was Sir Richard in his usual health when you left him?"

Arthur Wyndham hesitated before he answered.

"I—I supposed so."

The answer sounded curious to some ears.

"Did you know he suffered from weakness of the heart?"

"No."

"Did he complain at all of his health when you were with him?"

"He did not mention his health."

"At what time did you hear of his death?"

"At about nine o'clock in the evening. Dr. Parr called at my mother's house on his way home to tell us of it."

"Was there anyone else in the library whilst you were with Sir Richard?"

"No one. I saw no one else in the house except the footman who admitted me."

"Or in the grounds?"

"I saw no one."

"Was the library window open or closed when you were in the room?"

"That I did not notice."

"Did you visit Sir Richard Ravendale by appointment?"

"No. I knew I would be sure to see him at that hour. It was his custom to sit in his library every day between five and seven o'clock."

"What was the object of your visit?"

The coroner asked the question more as a matter of form than from a desire to seek a cause for suspicion against the young man. To his surprise Arthur Wyndham coloured painfully, and remained silent. Seeing his unwillingness to reply, he repeated the question with increased emphasis.

"What was the object of your visit to Sir Richard?"

"That has no bearing on the case. I decline to answer the question."

"Your visit had an object, then, beyond that of a mere formal call?"

Arthur Wyndham saw that by his reticence he had managed to direct suspicion against himself, and he sought to undo the impression he had made by frankly avowing that this was the case.

The coroner, thinking it more politic not to press the point just then as to what that object might be, went on.

"Owing to your former connection with the family, Mr. Wyndham, you were doubtless in a position to know something of their relations towards each other. Were those relations happy or otherwise?"

Once more he hesitated, but only for an instant.

"I never saw any disagreements," he replied.

The answer was cautious, and the coroner saw that the witness had no intention of divulging family secrets.

"I understand," continued the coroner, "that the two other members of the family, Miss Blake and Mr. George Blake, are by no means nearly related to Sir Richard?"

"They are the children of Sir Richard's first cousin; but, as neither Miss Blake nor her brother have anything to do with this affair, I cannot see why their names should be dragged in. Miss Blake was in Chorlton on Monday afternoon, and did not return home till after seven. Mr. George Blake is at present in London reading with a crammer."

The coroner smiled at the vindication of two persons whose doings had not even been referred to.

"If you prefer it, Mr. Wyndham," he said, "I will put the question in another way. Do you know of any member of Sir Richard's family with whom he was not on perfectly friendly terms?"

"No one, but—no, I mean, no one. I know of no one."

"You suspect some one of bearing him a grudge?"

"I suspect no one of anything!"

"Do you know of anyone, relative or not, to whom the death of Sir Richard Ravendale would be a benefit—anyone besides Sir Philip, I mean?"

Arthur Wyndham appeared to ponder this question for a few seconds without any answer taking shape in his mind. Suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon him. He grew

deadly pale, and pressed his hands convulsively to his forehead. An intense silence prevailed in the room as every breath was held, and every head was craned forward to catch his answer.

"I know of no one," he said, but without raising his head or altering his attitude. His voice sounded hollow in the silence. Nor did his answer put an end to the tension: it rather increased it, for not the shadow of a doubt lay on any mind that he had uttered a lie. He opened his lips as if to speak again, then he evidently changed his intention and said nothing.

"Have you anything more to say?" asked the coroner, somewhat sternly.

"Nothing!"

He gave a sigh of relief and moved towards the seat he had occupied. Before he reached it, however, a jurymen rose and inquired if witness had accomplished the object of his visit to Sir Richard Ravendale. The ulterior meaning of the question was unmistakable; the finger of suspicion was plainly pointed at the questioned. Arthur Wyndham stood still as if he had been struck. All at once, to every one's surprise, he turned round and faced the jurymen boldly, and in a clear tone, in which there was no hesitation whatever, he replied,—

"No, I did not accomplish my object."

Not a few persons fancied they could see very clearly into the Ravendale Mystery; and when Arthur Wyndham sat down the looks that were bent on him were not calculated to make him feel kindly disposed towards his fellow-men. They denied him the place of a man and a brother.

CHAPTER III.

A LINK MISSING.

THERE was a visible flutter amongst the servants when Albert Hirsch, the valet, was called upon to give evidence. The cook became, if anything, a few degrees hotter. One of themselves was actually standing up before that crowd, and there was no knowing whose turn might come next.

"Poor Halbert!" whispered Jemima, the kitchenmaid, in a tone of sympathy, as Hirsch passed her.

Albert did not appear to share the sentiment of pity for himself; he looked neither confused nor frightened, and he made a deferential bow first to the coroner and then to the jurymen, and stood like one that challenges the world to find a flaw in his integrity. He spoke with a slight foreign accent; otherwise his English was unimpeachable.

After the usual preliminary questions as to his name and position in the household, the coroner asked what he knew of the death.

"I know nothing of the death," he said, simply. "I discovered the body shortly after seven o'clock on Monday evening—about a quarter past, I should say. I went into the library to tell Sir Richard it was time to dress for dinner. I thought, perhaps, he had fallen asleep."

"What made you think that?"

"My master usually came to his dressing-room as soon as the dressing-bell rang at five minutes to seven. On Monday evening the dressing-bell rang, as usual, but Sir Richard did not come up. I waited for some time before I went down. I met James, the footman in the hall, and mentioned to him that Sir Richard was late in coming to dress, and James said it was because Mr. Wyndham was with him in the library. Sir Richard had once told me always to remind him if he were late, as he disliked to be unpunctual at meals, or to be hurried in dressing. For this reason I decided to knock at the library-door, even though Mr. Wyndham was with him, in case he had not noticed how the time was passing. I got no answer to my knock, so I went into the room and found my master alone and lying dead."

"Describe the position of the body when you first saw it."

"It was lying face downward on the floor in a slanting direction between the window and the fireplace, the head near the window. I fancied my master had fainted, and I turned the body over and opened the window wider to let in more air. I called out to James, and he came in from the hall. I told him to fetch water and some some brandy, and to go for the housekeeper."

"Had you no idea he was dead?"

"Of course he was dead," interrupted Sir Philip, suddenly, before Hirsch had time to answer the question.

The coroner frowned and moved in his chair with a jerk. Sir Philip had, as it were, cast a reflection upon his manner of conducting the inquiry by thus hinting that he had put a useless question. To show that his authority was not to be trifled with, even by a baronet, and that he had a right to investigate any point he pleased, he repeated the question.

"Had you no idea he was dead?"

"No, sir, not at first. His face looked much as usual. There was colour in the cheeks."

"That is commonly the case in death resulting from heart disease," was the coroner's comment.

"It's a proof of it almost," murmured Dr. Farr, *sotto voce*, with a glance of approval at the coroner.

"Did you know Sir Richard had a weak heart?" was next asked.

"Yes, sir; but I did not think it was bad enough to kill him."

"Was the deceased's clothing disarranged when you found the body?"

"No. I myself loosened the clothing about the neck and shoulders."

"Why did you do that?"

"I thought it the proper thing to do in a fainting fit."

"Did you notice any marks on the neck?"

"No, sir, none whatever."

The answer was positive enough to convince everyone of its truth.

"The deceased wore a collar. Did you remove it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it tossed or crumpled?"

"As far as I remember, it was not. I did not pay particular attention to my master's clothing; but I don't think there was anything unusual about it, or I should have noticed."

"Was there any disorder in the room? Any sign of a struggle having taken place, for instance?"

"I do not think so. I noticed nothing different from usual in the room, except that the window, the one to which the body was nearest, was open. It is a French window, and it was open a few inches. I opened it wider."

"Sir Richard was not in the habit of keeping it open?"

"Not in winter."

"Was the body cold when you found it?"

"The hands were cold. I rubbed them until Mrs. Cripps came."

"After you knocked at the library door, did you hear anyone moving in the room—before you went in, I mean?"

"No, sir; and I listened attentively to hear voices on account of what James had told me."

"Would anyone have had time to escape between the time of your knock and your entrance?"

"Yes, perhaps; but unless the window had been already open I should have heard the bolt being slipped. The bolt on that window is rather stiff."

"Then we may presume the murderer—or, at all events the visitor, had escaped before you went to the door, and by the window, in all probability?"

This statement was made as a kind of summing-up for the benefit of the jury; and, having made it, the coroner went on addressing Hirsch.

"Do you know of anyone who might have had a quarrel with Sir Richard?"

"Not lately, sir."

"There have been quarrels then?"

"Yes, between Sir Richard and Mr. Ravensdale—Sir Philip I mean."

"It is unnecessary to go into the matter in that case. Was there no one else with whom the deceased may have had differences?"

"No, sir, not that I am aware of."

At an intimation from the coroner, the valet retired with a quiet bow, and the coroner was heard to remark that he was a model witness.

James, the footman, next came forward, evidently in a state of extreme nervousness, which he betrayed chiefly in the action of his hands, clasping them tightly together, and moving them spasmodically up and down with a wringing gesture.

At the first question put to him, he gave an agonised glance about the room, directing it not to the occupants, but to the walls, the floor, and the ceiling, as if he sought for some means of deliverance from the horrors of his position.

The coroner repeated his question twice before the unfortunate footman could bring himself to stammer out his own name. Having once found courage to do this much, however, he became reassured, and went on readily enough.

He corroborated the evidence of the previous witness as to the conversation he had had with him about Mr. Wyndham's presence in the library.

He also described the position of the body when he first saw it, and agreed with Hirsch in stating that there was nothing amiss with the clothing. Asked at what time he had admitted Mr. Wyndham, he gave half-past five as the hour.

"Did you see Sir Richard in the library when you announced Mr. Wyndham?" inquired the Coroner.

"Yessir, 'e was sitting by the table writing."

"Did you notice if he looked as usual?"

"I think so, sir. 'E got up to meet Mr. Wyndham."

"Was there anyone else in the room?"

"No sir."

"Did you see Mr. Wyndham again?"

"No sir."

"You told Hirsch that Mr. Wyndham was still in the library at about a quarter after seven. What made you think that?"

"Because I 'adn't seen 'im go out, and I 'ad been in the 'all ever since I came up from tea."

"What time was that?"

"'All past six, sir."

"Half past six! But Mr. Wyndham said he left at six o'clock. He had gone when you came from tea."

"I 'eard him talking to Sir Richard when I passed the library door on my way back to the 'all."

"Are you sure? Are you sure it was Mr. Wyndham, I mean?"

"Yessir."

"Did you listen."

"No sir. I never listens," indignantly.

"Then what made you think it was Mr. Wyndham's voice?"

The coroner was evidently making an effort to clear Mr. Wyndham if he could.

"It couldn't have been anyone else."

"Why not?"

"There was nobody else in the house. Miss Blake 'adn't come in."

"What time did you go to tea?"

"Six o'clock, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"It might 'ave been a few minutes before six," James admitted.

"Did anyone take your place in the hall when you were at tea?"

"No sir."

"Very well. You were absent at tea for half an hour—more than half an hour. Some one else might have come in and Mr.

Wyndham might have gone out without your knowledge."

"I would have heard the bell, sir."

"What bell?"

"The 'all door bell if anybody 'ad come, and the library bell if Mr. Wyndham had gone. Sir Richard always rang when a visitor was leaving."

The Coroner's effort had been in vain; it had but served to deepen the impression that there was something under that visit which Arthur Wyndham had paid to the dead man. It was generally believed that he had purposely made a false statement concerning the time at which he had left Ravensdale Hall. The footman's arguments, though not amounting to proof positive, were pretty conclusive.

"Did anyone besides yourself know of Mr. Wyndham's visit?" was the next question.

"I told Halbert sir."

"Yes, I know. Anyone else?"

James paused in order to consider, whereupon Thomas, the antiquated butler, rose and replied for him.

"Yes, he told me, sir. Don't you remember, James, you told me when you came into the servants' hall. I was standing by the fire and—"

"That will do," interposed the coroner.

"I will question you presently."

Turning to James he asked if he remembered mentioning the matter.

"Yessir, I do, and now I come to think of it, I told Priscilla."

James blushed a lively red at the name of Priscilla, and fell to an attentive contemplation of the carpet at his feet.

"Who is Priscilla?"

"The under 'ousemaid, sir. She came to me in the 'all—" here James, emboldened by his own admission, flashed a look of triumph at Hirsch, from which it was easy to surmise that the two were rivals for Priscilla's favour, "she came to me in the 'all just before I went to tea, and said she 'ad lost 'er brooch, and I told 'er as she couldn't get it then on account of Mr. Wyndham being with the master, and she said it didn't matter, only she 'ad an 'eadache and—"

"Never mind what she said," put in the Coroner, seeing no connection between the under housemaid's headache and the case at issue. "I'll question her in good time also."

"She ain't 'ere," remarked James, by way of vindicating his communicativeness.

"Not here? How?"

"She's gone to Chorlton to nurse 'er mother that's ill."

"I suppose you have ascertained that it was not necessary to produce Priscilla as a witness?" This to the Chorlton police.

"Heard nothing about her before, sir," was the answer.

"Did you not make inquiries as to who were in the house on Monday afternoon?" questioned the coroner, sharply. "You should have seen that everyone in the house on that day was at hand in case of being required."

The examination of James was resumed. "Did I understand you to say that Priscilla couldn't get her brooch because Mr. Wyndham was in the library? Had she lost it in the library?"

"She said she thought she might have dropped it there in the morning when she was cleaning the fireplace. She had an 'eadache and was going to her room, and wanted to find it before she went up."

"Was she not at the servants' tea, then?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"Was anyone else absent from tea?"

"No, sir; no one but Priscilla."

The importance of this statement was at once evident, and there was what is known as a "sensation" amongst the audience, whilst James himself suddenly realized that somehow or other he had turned suspicion on the under-housemaid.

He became hot and cold all over, and trembled from head to foot. Twice he attempted to speak, but his words seemed stifled in his

throat. The despair and confusion depicted on his face and in his attitude were eminently ludicrous to those who watched him, to his fellow-servants especially so, since they had for months seen him pining and languishing for Priscilla's favourable recognition.

In his secret soul he had been rejoicing ever since that Monday afternoon when Priscilla came to him with an unwonted air of confiding friendship and asked his permission to go and search for her brooch in the library. She told him of her headache, and when, with sudden boldness, he dared to stroke her hair, she did not repulse his caress. He had been a happy man ever since, and so soon as all this fuss about Sir Richard's death should be over and the household should be once more in its right mind, he intended to make further amatory advances to the pretty under-housemaid—for Priscilla was a well-favoured young person—in the full belief that they would not be repelled.

Now, in an instant, by his own hand, he had pulled down the castle of delight he had been at such pains to build. He had actually put it into people's heads that Priscilla had something to do with Sir Richard's death, and his fellow-servants were grinning at his discomfiture.

Of what avail to tell Priscilla he never meant it, that a trap had been laid for him which he had not suspected? She would never forgive him for this, never again would she let him stroke her hair.

Meanwhile, the coroner, wholly blind to James's emotion, inquired when she went to Chorlton.

As James seemed unable to reply the housekeeper made bold to reply for him.

"On Thursday night."

"What time?"

"That I cannot say. We were all in such a fuss about the discovery of those marks."

"Was it after the discovery was made that she went?"

"I—I think so. Yes, it was," with sudden recollection.

"What is her other name?"

"Vance," gasped James, determined to strike a blow in Priscilla's defence; "but please, sir—"

"Well?"

"Please, sir, she ain't got nothing to do with it. Or could she, and 'er in 'er room with an 'eadache?"

"Do you know her address in Chorlton?"

James was silent.

"Thirteen, Market-street," put in Friker, the detective, quietly.

The Chorlton men looked incredulous, that Friker, who had only arrived an hour or two before the inquest should know more than themselves.

At that moment someone called out,—

"Open the door or the window! quick! water! Sir Phillip is ill!"

Dr. Parr bustled over to the Baronet, who put out his hand and waved him off.

"It is—nothing. I am not ill—only the heat. That is better since the window has been opened. I am all right now. The room is so crowded."

He took out a large silk handkerchief and drew it across his pallid face once or twice. Dr. Parr went back to his seat, and the interest returned to the proceedings of the inquest.

The coroner turned to the Chorlton police and said,—

"Priscilla Vance must be produced as a witness."

"I have already sent for her," said Friker, in the same quiet tone. "She ought to be here soon—if she is in Chorlton."

At his last words he took out his watch and gazed at the dial with an interest so deep that the approving glance of the coroner and the disapproving glance of the Chorlton police were lost upon him. The jurymen nodded to each other ominously; they had heard the detective's words "if she is in Chorlton," and

they knew that the doubt they implied might mean an adjourned inquest.

The coroner put one more question to James.

"How long was it after Albert spoke to you in the hall before he called you into the library?"

"About a minute, sir."

James resumed his seat with a heavy heart. Arthur Wyndham, recalled, was asked if it was the case that Sir Richard had not rung the library bell on his departure.

"It is the case."

"Why did he not do so?"

"I do not know. He was too much excited perhaps."

This remark produced a profound sensation. Arthur had fallen into the trap he had previously avoided so carefully.

The coroner, with the least visible shadow of a smile lurking about his mouth, further asked:—

"What was the cause of Sir Richard's excitement?"

After an instant's hesitation, the witness replied coolly enough.

"He was angry!"

"What about?"

"I decline to answer!"

"You had better answer. Your silence will only direct needless suspicion against you, at the same time that it hinders the course of justice."

Arthur Wyndham remained silent, a look of determination on his face betokening his intention to remain so.

"Am I to understand, then, that you and Sir Richard had a quarrel?"

"Yes, we had a quarrel; it was inevitable!"

He spoke slowly, and his last words were so low as to be heard only by a few—those nearest to him.

"What was inevitable?"

"That we should part in anger," he said simply; [and, with unmistakable regret in his tone, he added, "I am sorry, as he is dead."

"Murdered," said a voice behind him.

"Murdered!" echoed the witness, dreamily and sadly.

"You refuse to state the cause of your quarrel?"

"Yes, I refuse!"

The coroner intimated that he had no more questions to put. The inquisitive jurymen, who had previously questioned him, rose, and looking hard at the witness, said,—

"You stated that you had an object in visiting Sir Richard Ravendale—an object which you did not accomplish. Will his death make any difference towards its accomplishment?"

The witness returned the jurymen's fixed stare steadily, and straightening himself up to his full height, replied,

"You mean will Sir Richard's death be to my advantage? In the full knowledge of my own innocence I answer you, yes. More than this I cannot and will not say."

Everyone in the room was thunderstruck at this damaging admission, and for a full minute no one moved or spoke. The jurymen was too much taken aback to resume his seat, and he stood gazing at Arthur Wyndham. The turning of the door-handle broke the sort of spell which Arthur's words had cast on his audience. Someone inquired for Mr. Friker.

The detective went out and the coroner called the next witness, Mrs. Criggs, the housekeeper. Before he had finished the preliminary questions, Friker returned, and said that the messenger he had sent for Priscilla Vance had returned.

"Is Priscilla Vance here, then?"

"Priscilla Vance and her mother left Chorlton on Thursday night!"

"And where are they now?"

"No one knows."

(To be continued.)

MANY live as if they were a snail and the world their shell.

INNUMERABLE traditional customs and beliefs of the simpler sort will be found peculiar to the Scottish people themselves, of which I give a few examples. If you first see the new moon with empty hands you will be unfortunate for a month to come. If you see a cow lick either of her fore feet you will immediately hear of a death. Seeing a snail on bare ground is a bad omen, but to find one on the grass is a sign of a plentiful year. In Roxburghshire those meeting black snails take them by the horns and throw them over their left shoulders in order to go on their way prosperously. The sudden loss of hair is a prognostic of the loss of children, health, or property. To dream of one's teeth falling out is the certain sign of the death of a friend. The shrinking of meat in a pot while cooking presages downfall in life, and should it swell you will be prosperous. It is unlucky to be recalled after having set out on a journey, to be told of something you had forgotten; but you can destroy the spell by at once partaking of meat and drink. When you first put on a new coat, if you will place money in the right hand pocket you will not know want; but if by mistake you place it in the left-hand pocket, you will be in need as long as that coat is worn. To sweep a house by night is the greatest possible insult that can be offered to the fairies and the spirits of the dead; and to sweep out the dust by the front door is to drive away good fortune. A dock leaf will cure a nettle sting if you will incant.

According to the best writers on the subject it has been ascertained that in beginning to sleep the senses do not unitedly fall into a state of slumber, but drop off one after the other. The sight ceases, in consequence of the protection of the eyelids, to receive impressions first, while all the other senses preserve their sensibility entire. The sense of taste is the next which loses its perceptibility to impressions, and then the sense of smelling. The hearing is next in order, and last of all comes the sense of touch. Furthermore, the senses are thought to sleep with different degrees of profoundness. The sense of touch sleeps the most lightly and is the most easily awakened; the next easiest is the hearing; the next is the sight, and the taste and smelling awake the last. Another remarkable circumstance deserves notice: certain muscles and parts of the body begin to sleep before others. Sleep commences at the extremities, beginning with the feet and legs, and creeping toward the centre of nervous action. The necessity for keeping the feet warm and perfectly still as a preliminary of sleep is well known. From these explanations it will not appear surprising that with one or more of the senses, and perhaps also one or more parts of the body, imperfectly asleep, there should be at the same time an imperfect kind of mental action, which produces the phenomenon of dreaming. One of the senses after another ceases to be. Eyelids close and there is no sight. Death is being rehearsed in slumber. Darkness has come. The sense of hearing slumbers; the sense of touch; the sense of taste. They are no more. The slumberless soul, having thought, and mind, and memory in its keeping, may go dreaming when the body has no immediate use for it. But it will linger about while there is life, and departs not for ever until real death comes. Unless by some rude shock that calls the senses to action prematurely the process of awakening is also gradual. When awakening time comes the striking of a forgotten clock may be heard, and sounds of the morning are distinct where sounds of the night have not been noticed. The senses of touch and hearing are awakening; the eyes open and sight comes; taste and smelling senses come, and the man thinks he smells his breakfast cooking. He is awake. Sleep has gone as mysteriously as it came. A new period of wakefulness is now life, a resurrection from the sleeping semblance of death.

FACETIE.

THE independent man is often in dependent circumstances.

NEVER judge a man by the length of his creed, but by the breadth of it.

IF every man was as big as he feels there wouldn't be standing room in this country.

"HANS, name three beasts of prey," "Two lions and a tiger."

SILENCE is golden. The gas-meter never says a word.

MUSICAL composer: "Have you seen my last song?" Frank friend: "I sincerely hope so."

THE successful lawyer should be well dressed. His prosperity depends upon new suits.

"You're discharged," said the Judge, and he snapped it out so quick that the Sheriff turned pale.

THE actor appears to be a fragmentary individual. He's always in parts, and the parts are in pieces.

"I WOULDN'T mind my wife's having the last word," said Mr. Meekins, "if she would only hurry up and get to it."

AN Irishman, writing a sketch of his life, says he early ran away from his father, because he discovered he was only his uncle.

Houses are run up in a few weeks by landlords, and run down by tenants ever after.

TEACHER: "What is quickness?" Scholar: "Quickness is when a person drops a hot plate."

THE only way to win in an argument with a woman is to walk off when you have stated your side of it.

HE who has ridden in a country 'bus knows how cream feels when it is being churned to butter.

COWARDICE REBUKED.—He: "Methinks, if I only dared to kiss you?" She: "Harry, whatever you are, don't be a coward."

A LIVERPOOL man claims to have invented a machine which will do all kinds of machine work. It is understood to have no cogs.

"MY wife is queen of the tea-table," remarked a host to a friendly visitor. "And she never reigns but she pours," was the quiet reply.

BUTCHER: "Did you tell Mr. Gore that his bill had been running a long time?" "Yes, sir." "What did he say?" "He said, 'Do let it stand a while, for Heaven's sake!'"

A LITTLE boy, the son of a reporter, was asked what his father's occupation was, and replied, with all simplicity, "He is a dreadful accident maker for the newspapers."

WE see some one is advertising, "My wife's haunce." It is to be regretted that he does not keep his little domestic discomforts to himself.

"How did you come to leave your wife in Paris, Hill?" "She couldn't make up her mind whether she wanted a yard or a yard and a half, and I got tired of waiting."

THESE typewriting machines are well enough, so far as they go. They print quite well; but when it comes to spelling they are not in it, as we say in the vulgar.

TRAVELLER: "Why are those people being sent to Siberia?" Russian Official: "They refuse to do their starvingvitz in quistivitz."

IRATE Father: "I'll teach you to lie and steal, you rascal you!" Wayward son (from the midst of the scrimmage): "Oh, don't trouble—ouch—yourself, father. I know how already!"

SHE: "Will you write to me on your return to college?" He: "Why—er—you know I can't write?" She: "Oh, I don't expect you to write brilliantly or amusingly; just write as you talk."

THE man who has never had a crayon portrait of himself made by an amateur artist probably does not yet know what it is to have his pride fully humbled.

"How are you coming on with your tragedy?" "Better than I expected. I've killed off all the principal characters except two, and they are not on speaking terms."

"CLARA JOHNSON says that you and I are engaged, Ethel," said Percy Verisopht. "Clara Johnson always did say every spiteful thing about me she could think of."

BENEDICK: "When I lost my fortune there was nothing I regretted so much as that I could not afford to keep my excellent cook any longer." "And what did you do?" "I married her."

"WELL, what do you think of the new neighbours who have moved in next door, Mrs. Fryer?" "I haven't had a chance to form an opinion. They haven't had a washing day yet."

FIRST BOY (contemptuously): "Hah! Your ma takes in washing." SECOND BOY: "O' course; you didn't s'pose she'd leave it hanging out over night unless your pa was in jail, did ye?"

WAGAWAY: "So you heard my lectures on 'miracles.' Do you know what a miracle is, my little maid?" Bessie: "Oh, yes. My sister said it would be a miracle if you didn't stop for dinner to-day."

HE (of Boston): "Professor Skilhigh is going to lecture on sun-spots to-morrow." SHE (of Chicago): "Well, if I thought he could tell of a real, sure enough cure for them, I'd go to hear him. I freeble so easily."

"No, mum," said Bridget, "I don't bring any references. I didn't think you would care for the opinions of some of the parsons I have been working for." And Bridget was promptly engaged.

LAWYER: "I am not feeling very well, doctor. Does it make any difference on which side I sleep?" Doctor (with a wink): "Well, a good lawyer will never lie on the wrong side."

PRESIDENT of gas company: "What was that bright light in the north part of the city last night?" Employé: "The aurora borealis." President (with haughty firmness): "Have some aurora borealis meters put in at once."

"And would you believe it, on the very day I was married, my cashier, taking advantage of my absence, ran away with all my cash." "Too bad; but, my dear fellow, you know that misfortunes never come singly."

WILLIAMSON: "That stranger is Blwidakad-waxski, the Russian. He has made a name for himself." Henderson: "Has he? Well, he must be a talented man if he made the one he now has."

LADY (quashingly): "Oh, Colonel, you have just returned from Bath; did you see dear Mrs. Querky's baby? Do tell me how it looked." Colonel: "Bald—clean-shaven—red in the face, as if he had been a hard drinker."

"DOESN'T Mrs. Maxwell believe in co-education of the sexes?" "Co-education? I should say not. Why, she believes a girl ought to be raised so carefully that when she sees a man she will say, 'What is that, mamma?'"

"GENTS," shouted a small boy, as he poked his head into a Fourth Avenue street car, "did you mail that letter your wife gave you this morning?" And six men simultaneously pulled the bell-rope and hurriedly left the car.

A GENTLEMAN who was travelling through one of the most insalubrious districts of India, found living there an Irishman of very contented appearance. "I don't see how you can live in a place," said the traveller, "where people die so thick and fast." "Tell me the place, sor," said the man, "where people never die—tell me the place, and I'll go there meself to end me days!"

REMARKED the young man in swelling tones, "I'm an agnostic." Elderly gentleman: "And what is an agnostic?" Fresh youth: "An agnostic is a fellow who isn't sure of anything." Elderly gentleman: "I see; but how does it happen you are sure you are an agnostic?"

FENDERSON: "Brown and his wife, over there on the sofa, appear to be a loving pair; but if you should see them alone once perhaps you wouldn't think them so happy." Fogg: "Oh, but I have seen them alone, each of them, and if anything they seemed happier than when they are together."

A NUMBER of country neighbours in England are asking the wife of the village butcher what sort of a person is the Squire's newly-married wife. To these enquiries they receive the oracular but none the less convincing reply: "A puffet lady—she don't know one joint of meat from another."

"I WONDER why little Dick doesn't come home," said the mother. "I want him to run on a lot of errands." "Does he know it?" asked her husband. "Yes; I told him before he went to school." "You might have had more sense," remarked the father, who was once a boy himself.

SHE (after the services): "You dreadful fellow! Why did you smile during the offertory?" He: "I couldn't help it. There was Miss Addie Pose singing, 'Had I the wings of a dove.' The mental picture of a two-hundred-pounder trying to fly with a pair of four-inch wings was too much for me."

THE little boy picked himself out of the puddle where his rude playmates had thrown him. He wiped the mud from his velvet trousers, his silk stockings, and his lace collar, and straightened out his long golden curls as well as their bedraggled condition would permit. "This," he said, bitterly, "is what comes of being mamma's little pet!"

SCHOOLMASTER: "What is meant by a mental occupation?" Pupil: "One in which we use our minds." Schoolmaster: "And a manual occupation?" Pupil: "One in which we use our hands." Schoolmaster: "Now, which of these occupations is mine? Come, now, what do I use most in teaching you?" Pupil (quickly): "Your cane, sir."

OLD LADY: "There is one thing I notice particularly about that young man who calls to see you. He seems to have an inborn, instinctive respect for woman. He treats every woman as though she were a being from a higher sphere, to be approached only with the utmost delicacy and deference." Granddaughter (sweet eighteen): "Yes, he's horribly bashful."

HOUSEHOLD: "I am going to move to the suburbs next Monday, and I'd like you to do the job." Mover: "How many loads?" "I don't know. You moved me once, you may remember." "Yes; I needed three wagons then to get through; but that was some years ago. Have you moved since?" "Yes, indeed, half-a-dozen times." "Hum! I guess one wagon will carry all you have left."

AN Irish gentleman invited an English nobleman to shoot on his place on the west coast of Ireland. The Englishman was placed in charge of the gamekeeper, an old servant, who saw to it that the Baron should be favourably impressed with the game on the estate, so far as words could impress him. There was nothing that ever ran or flew that the nobleman inquired about but the gamekeeper asserted could be found on the place by hundreds and thousands. The nobleman was amused, and asked scores of questions about beasts and birds whose homes were in Asia and Africa. But of every one the gamekeeper asserted that it could be found in abundance somewhere on the place. At last the nobleman asked, "Are there any paradoxes here?" The keeper scratched his head at this poser, and, after a moment's hesitation, answered, "Badad, then, your lordship may find two or three of them sometimes on the said when the d's out!"

SOCIETY.

EMBROIDERY will be in high favour on all dressy and semi-dressy costumes.

LADIES will be delighted to hear that a new form of ronge has been invented, which is not affected by heat, damp, or touch.

RUFFLED, flounced, tucked, pinked petticoats are great features this spring, their elegance being made to be seen. They are almost full-dress enough to wear about the house, with a suitable blouse or tea jacket.

LORD AND LADY TENNYSON, who have been residing for nearly six months in the Isle of Wight, Farringford, near Freshwater, are to remove to Aldworth, their place on the Hampshire Downs, near Haslemere, where they will pass the summer and early autumn.

THE Prince and Princess of Wales will not now be able to attend the National Eisteddfod which is to be held at Rhyl in August, but it is almost certain that the Duke and Duchess of Connaught will be present, and they are to be the guests of the Duke and Duchess of Westminster at Eaton Hall.

THE young queen of the Netherlands has had the grand cross of the Chevalier Order, set in brilliants, conferred upon her by the Sultan. The order, which is only worn by women, was instituted by the Sultan in 1890.

THACKERAY used to say that if novel-writing failed, he would try to earn his living at calligraphy. What he could do in this direction was truly remarkable. On one occasion he wrote the Lord's Prayer on a piece of newspaper inside a circle "the size of a threepenny piece leaving room for the crown and the figure three."

THE Empress of Russia has her sister's, the Princess of Wales, love of dress, and is a most exquisite dresser. She gets most of her dresses from Paris, and procures them by the dozen, expending enormous sums. The Empress is exceedingly fond of precious stones, of which she has a wonderful collection, and she has especially one necklace of emeralds which is quite unique. The stones are of great size and lustre. They were picked up one by one in different parts of the globe at great expense, and made into a necklace, in order that the Czar might give the Czarina an agreeable surprise on her birthday.

THERE is to be a craze for malachite during this season. The handles of fans, the barrels of opera glasses, the tops of parasols, even some of the personal ornaments are to be made of this hydrous carbonate of copper, which certainly will not accord with every colour. No doubt the most vulgar of millionaires will contrive to stick some of it on their carriages. A door-handle inlaid with malachite would be a novelty, and if the owner happened to come from the Emerald Isle there would be a certain amount of appropriateness in this wonderfully green substance. People are warned, however, that malachite does not look well in large quantities.

HIS MAJESTY is going to send some specimens of her own knitting and spinning over to America, to adorn the Women's Section of the Chicago World's Fair. Some of her paintings will accompany these interesting relics of her girlish industry; and Princess Beatrice also contributes some paintings for the same purpose. Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne, will send some of her clever modellings in clay; and Princess Christian gives a few pieces of cunning embroidery from her diligent fingers; so our Royal Ladies will add quite an interesting little collection of examples that women now can be as skilful in various handicrafts as they were in the days of King Solomon's "excellent" female, and that Queens and Princesses in the nineteenth century are by no means the least clever, or diligent, of their sex.

STATISTICS.

LESS than eight hundred persons own half the soil of Ireland.

JAPAN'S population of forty-one million souls lives on eighteen million acres.

A PERSON traverses about three-quarters of a mile in the course of an average walk.

TUNN is a lighthouse to every 14 miles of coast in England, to every 34 miles in Ireland, and to every 39 miles in Scotland.

WHEN Jerusalem was taken by Titus, A.D. 70, 1,100,000 Hebrews perished by the severe plague, famine, etc., and 97,000 were taken captive.

GEMS.

If you have a bone of contention with any one throw it to the dogs.

IN matters of conscience first thoughts are best. In matters of prudence, last thoughts are best.

SOME people are always bewailing their misfortunes, but never make an effort to overcome them.

CULIVATE courtesy and good breeding in the family circle. It is foolish to expect that a child who is rude at home will be polite away from home.

THE coming hours are open, yet pure and spotless; receptacles for whatever you may deposit there. Let us start up and live. Here come the moments that cannot be had again. Some few may yet be filled with imperishable gold.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GOLDEN CREAM CAKE.—Cream three-fourths of a cup of butter, add slowly two cups of sugar, add four eggs, one at a time, without first having beaten them. Beat well. Mix two teaspoonfuls of baking powder with three cups of flour, and add this alternately with one cup of milk. Bake in layers. This makes a yellow cake, which is more attractive with coconut filling.

BEAN STEW.—Cut one pound of gravy beef into small pieces, one carrot, turnip, and onion. Put them all into a jar or basin, with ample seasoning of pepper and salt, a tablespoonful of vinegar, and a little cold water. Cover the basin or jar, and let the contents cook in a moderately heated oven for nearly three hours; after which, pour off the gravy, thicken it with a little flour; then serve on a hot dish, garnished with boiled carrots and turnips.

INDIAN PANCAKES.—An Indian pancake is made by boiling half a teaspoonful of rice in a pint of milk till the rice is so soft that it may be beaten to a pulp. Then two or three well-beaten eggs and about four tablespoonfuls of sugar are added, with a few drops of cinnamon flavouring. Press this mixture into a round shallow dish or tin, in order to shape it, then turn it into a frying pan containing some butter, and when it has attained a pale golden colour, lift it carefully on to a dish, and serve it hot, garnished with pieces of preserved ginger and crystallised cherries.

JAM SANDWICH.—One teaspoonful of flour, 1 of sugar, 1 ounce butter, 1 egg, half a teaspoonful of milk, and a teaspoonful of baking powder. Mix flour, butter, and sugar well together in a basin, add the egg, previously well beaten (yolk and white separately, then together), and the milk. When thoroughly well mixed, and just before putting into the oven, add the baking powder, and pour into a well-buttered tin, which has been first made hot in the oven. Bake twenty minutes in rather a quick oven. Cut in half, spread jam or lemon curd over, fold as a sandwich, sprinkle sifted sugar over, and serve at once.

MISCELLANEOUS.

CORK, it sunk two hundred feet deep in the ocean, will not rise, on account of the pressure of the water.

BOTH oranges and lemons are packed unripe, the latter when quite green, and the former when just turning from green to yellow.

GRASSHOPPERS attain their greatest size in South America, where they grow to a length of five inches, and their wings spread out ten inches.

QUEEN MARGUERITE'S famous pearl necklace is every year increased by the king's gift of an additional row of pearls, and it is now said to be too large for beauty.

BLOOD travels from the heart through the arteries ordinarily at the rate of about twelve inches per second; its speed through the capillaries is at the rate of three one-hundredths of an inch per second.

THE island on which is built the Eddystone Lighthouse is supposed to be the smallest inhabited island in the world. At low water it is thirty feet in diameter, while at high water the base of the light completely covers it.

IN the Arctic regions, when the thermometer is below zero, persons can converse more than a mile distant. Dr. Jamieson asserts that he heard every word of a sermon at the distance of two miles.

THERE has been a great deal of study and investigation on the subject of the colour of different races, and why there should be such marked contrasts. The best authorities have decided that climate, diet and surroundings cause the differences in colour.

ACCORDING to a recent reckoning, a human being of either sex, who is a moderate eater and who lives to be seventy years old, consumes during the days of the years of his life a quantity of food which would fill twenty ordinary railway luggage vans.

IF a musket-ball be fired into the water it will not only rebound, but be flattened; if fired through a pane of glass it will make a hole the size of the ball without cracking the glass; if suspended by a thread it will make no difference, and the thread will not even vibrate.

THE Golden Rose given by the Pope once a year, has a stem of solid gold, more than a yard long, while the blossom is in mosaic, with engraved on it the name of the reigning Pontiff, and the titles of the Royal recipient; the golden leaves of the flower are studded with diamond dust to simulate morning dew, and the price of the bauble is as much as £800 for its manufacture alone, it being always made at one special shop, close to St. Peter's at Rome.

THE hydropathic treatment of a cold in the head is as follows. In the morning after rising, and at night before retiring, wash the feet and legs as high up as the knees in cold water, and rub them with a rough towel and massage them till the skin is red and glowing. Sniff tepid water up the nose frequently during the day, and sip with a teaspoon a glassful as hot as can be borne an hour before each meal and at bedtime. A few days is often quite sufficient for simple cases, and obstinate ones yield if the treatment is prolonged. No medicines are required.

THE Esquimaux have a thoroughly national tradition. One day Aninga, the moon, pursued his sister, the sun, but when he had caught her the sun turned and smeared his face with soot, the traces of which still remain. One of the tribes of North-Western India, who regard the monthly disappearance of the moon as burning, having connected the spots with this idea, and believe them to be the remains of ashes. The Scandinavians had a legend of their own. According to the Edda the moon once carried off two children as they came from the water bearing a jar; they can still be seen with it.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

B.—A billion is one million millions—1,000,000,000,000.

S. M. W.—The Registrar of Wills, Somerset House, Strand.

QUEEN OF LOVE.—The Fifth Lancers are at Meerut, Bengal.

BEAUTY.—The Prince of Wales has not a residence in Great Yarmouth.

CONSTANT READER.—The death of the witnesses does not affect the validity of the will.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—The landlord cannot raise the rent until the expiration of legal notice.

PAPELOPE.—A domestic servant cannot claim a "character" from her employer.

CARROTS.—Booh. You will find your red hair quite as good a defence against the sun as black.

F. B.—The present hours of closing were fixed by the Licensing Act of 1872.

V. C.—The Victoria Cross, "For Valour," is in the form of a Maltese cross, and is made of bronze.

LEARNER.—Quite possible. Get Pittman's "Phonographic Teacher," 6d., and follow instructions.

RALEIGH.—Unless you can get a divorce you are still liable for your wife's support if she comes on the union.

TOPSY.—A man dying intestate, leaving no widow, children, or father, his brothers and sisters share equally.

MIDDLEB.—A phonograph is a sound-writer, and a telephone is a sound-transmitter. The two things are altogether distinct.

J. S.—There are 10 chains to the acre, consequently your plot would be about 2 acres wide and 50 acres long; that would be 100 acres.

LADDIE.—You had better communicate with the United States Consul-General in England, 123, Victoria-street, London, S.W.

DOLLY.—A priest of the Church of Rome on acceding to the Church of England would be recognised as a priest without reordination.

HORATIUS.—Sir Herbert Stewart was wounded near Mehemneh, January 18, 1885, and died at Sakdal, on the banks of the Nile.

GRONDIS.—We cannot recommend it. The system seems sound enough, but if the management is unsound the whole thing is untrustworthy.

MABELLE.—Easter-day fell on April 9 in 1871. You will find the rule for the date of Easter for many years in any Prayer Book.

TOBY.—The body of a will may be amended by the addition of a codicil, which will require signing and witnessing in the usual way.

SAM.—Agent-General for New South Wales is at 9, Victoria-street; and the Agent-General for Queenstown at 1, Victoria-street, London.

JENNY WREN.—A letter to the Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, London, S.W., will get you the information.

NON-CONTENT.—If the girl is short she no doubt takes after her parents, or their parents. You cannot alter her.

INDIGNANT.—If the vicar is the school-manager he can grant or decline to grant the use of the schoolroom for meetings.

MATHURON.—Three weeks' notice is required to be given to the registrar of the district in which each party lives before marriage can take place.

DANDY.—As far as we understand your question, a promise by post to grant leave of absence need not be enclosed in a registered envelope.

CHARMING MOLLY.—The Second Battalion King's Own Borderers are at Meerut, Bengal. No word of their coming home.

N. F.—Man and Daly were tried and convicted at Warwick. The charge against them was quite distinct from that against Whitehead.

AGED P.—The First Battalion of the Worcestershire Regiment is now stationed at Poona. The head-quarters of the regiment is at Worcester.

"LITTLE DORRIT."—Tea should always be made from water which has just been boiled, and the tea should be used within five minutes of being made.

H. M.—The pay of those who have lost their Reserve papers is generally held over for a month; sometimes they are fined a month's pay.

TINA.—The quotation is, "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough how they come how we may," and is from "Hamlet," act 5, scene 2.

P. C.—A publican is not obliged to serve refreshments to a customer; but he is liable to an action if damages can be proved through his refusal.

TRIXIE.—Persons committed for "contempt of court" for not complying with a Judge's order for payment of debt are not subjected to prison dress nor hard labour.

HIGHLANDER.—There are nine kilts regiments 42nd and 73rd Linked as Royal Highlanders; 72nd and 78th Linked as Seaforth's; 79th, Cameron Highlanders; 91st and 93rd Linked as Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

GEOR.—You will have to make personal application at the dockyard. Situation cannot be obtained here. Judge whether you can afford to go so far on the chance of getting so little.

NEUTRAL.—The first boat race between the universities was at Henley, in 1829, and the next in 1836. Since 1856, when Cambridge won, the race has been rowed annually.

ANXIETY.—The man might be sent to prison for six weeks or two months, and then be refused his discharge, as the commanding officer's consent is necessary in addition to a payment of £15.

TRIBULATION.—A landlord can follow and distrain on your goods after you have left his premises within thirty days, if you have left clandestinely to avoid payment of rent.

A HARD CASE.—Parents are not bound to provide a home for children of full age, but should they come on the parish the father may be called upon to contribute to their support.

JIM.—It is not advisable to go to Australia at present, except Western Australia be selected, and even there success is problematical. Canada is the colony just now offering greatest inducements to emigrants.

FUNKY.—Your friend is right in his statement of law. You could be punished for disfiguring coins of the realm, but you won't be, because those who have charge of the law won't put it in operation against you.

YANKEE.—The man comes from being an American citizen, and he becomes again amenable to British law the moment he sets foot in this country. The chances are a thousand to one no notice would be taken of him.

HIS NAME.

I wrote your name upon the sand,
When once I wandered by the shore;
The waves leaped up to kiss the hand,
And that dear name was there no more.
On shifting sand, by changing sea,
Your name should not be writ by me.

I write your name in golden lines
Upon a page as pure as pearl;
A breath may blur the letters bright,
A careless hand the leaf may curl.
In some yet unborn hand, mayhap,
'Twill one day lie a yellow scrap.

Your name is graven on my heart
By Love's own scribe, sharp and true;
So of my life it is a part.
Each pulse becomes a thought of you.
And yet, though life is all too sweet,
Some day this heart must cease to beat.

Be thou the scribe, above the reach
Of woman's hand, in thoughts sublime,
And words that stir the listening land,
And echo down the aisles of time.
Lift by fair Honour's pearly flame,
In Fame's proud temple carve thy name.

H. G.

LADY-HELP.—China which has been lying aside and got smoked can be cleaned by rubbing salt on it when washing it. This will effectually remove the smoke stain, without hurting either the colours or the glass.

TRAVELLED EDITH.—The marriage is valid, and the facts stated would not entitle the husband to a divorce. He may refuse to live with his wife, but would be liable for her support and that of his children.

DORIS.—"Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small."

is from Longfellow's translation of a poem from the German of Friedrich von Logau.

S. A. G.—Send stamped envelope and penny stamp to Registrar, Stationers' Hall, Ludgate-hill, London, for form of application for copyrighting song. Fill that up when you get it and return to the Hall with postal order for 5s.

A REGULAR READER.—You cannot send more than five pounds to Canada by post, at a cost of 1s. 6d. per lb; you will also have to declare value when posting, in order that the duty may be fixed. Far handier to send per Globe or Atlas Parcel Express.

POPPY.—The correct quotation is as follows:—"This above all; to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man."

Hamlet, Act 1, Sc. 3.

SILAS.—You have one of the medals struck in commemoration of the sudden death of Princess Charlotte, only child of George IV, and a most amiable lady; an event which excited profound feeling throughout the British Kingdom.

HERITATION.—In the Army, as in most other things, it is the first step that costs. Well begun is half done. When a man has got to be a lance-corporal he has stepped on the first round of a ladder which if patiently climbed should lead to a commission.

B. H.—The solar year—that is the period in which the earth makes one revolution round the sun—is equal to 365 days 5 hours 48 minutes 46 seconds. Every fourth year is made a leap year to absorb the odd days and hours, but as that again absorbs too much only every fourth hundredth year is to be a leap year. 1800 was not, neither will 1900 be, but 2000 will, 2400, and so on.

PHIL'S SWEETHEART.—We cannot say the shortest time in which "a letter has ever come from Australia"; but the average time between London and Perth (Western Australia) is thirty-four days; London and Melbourne thirty-five days, and London and Sydney thirty-seven days.

COMPLICATIONS.—If a man has one wife living, he cannot, under the laws of this land, have another. Therefore the young lady to whom he was supposed to be married is not, and never was, his wife; and, of course, not being a wife, cannot get a divorce, which proceeding presupposes marriage.

LADY OLIVER.—You can, perhaps, learn shorthand without the aid of a teacher, but personal instruction is of very great assistance. Indeed, many persons cannot learn it without careful instruction. No exact time for learning can be given, as it takes many pupils much longer than others to master shorthand. From three to twelve months seems to be the usual time.

DRAPELING OWL.—We do not regard any of the Australian colonies as particularly promising at the present time, but Western Australia is the one that is making the biggest bids for emigrants. You must have two complete suits of upper clothing and half-a-dozen of each article of underclothing. That is the regulation, but if you possess more upper suits take them all with you.

IN SEARCH OF KNOWLEDGE.—The coconut shell, after being dried and scraped, forms the Indian hock, used by all classes for smoking tobacco. In Malaya, the shell under the name of parut, is used for children's games. It is taken between the feet and sent as far backward as possible by a twist of the foot. The coconut shell also furnishes drinking goblets, which, carved exteriorly and mounted in silver, are a great ornament. Small articles, such as baskets, ladies' spoons and other such domestic articles are made of it. Beads for rosaries are also turned from the shell.

TITA.—The reason a person sinks in quicksand is because the latter is composed chiefly of small particles of mica mixed largely with water. The mica is so smooth that the fragments slip upon each other with the greatest facility, so that any heavy body which displaces them will sink, and continue to sink until a solid bottom is reached. When particles of sand are ragged and angular, any weight pressing on them will crowd them together until they are compacted into a solid mass. A sand composed of mica or soapstone, when mixed with sufficient water, seems incapable of such consolidation.

BRASSIE.—The mending of lace is an art of itself, and many professional menders, who are usually French or German, earn handsome livings working at this dainty task. A knowledge of lace stitching is necessary in mending handsome lace. If an ordinary piece tears, mend it with lace thread, which comes in small, soft balls at five to ten cents, imitating the groundwork much to the best of your ability. Before taking a stitch, basten the lace on a piece of embroidery, leather or stiff paper, otherwise it will be drawn out of shape and distorted by puckers. In pulling out the heating threads after darning a tear, be careful to clip the threads into short lengths.

A BEGINNER.—In making pickles use none but the best vinegar. Never keep pickles in glass earthenware, but in glass or hard stoneware, and well covered with vinegar. They should be examined every month or two, and soft pieces removed. If there is much tendency to soften, it is advisable to strain off the vinegar, add to each gallon a cupful of sugar, boil it, and return it to the pickle jar while hot. The occasional addition of a little sugar keeps pickles good, and improves them. Spices in pickles should be used whole, slightly pressed, but preferably not ground; if ground, they should be tied up in thin muslin bags. Most pickles, if well kept, improve with age by the vinegar losing its raw state, and the flavour of the spices blending with it.

A WOULD BE VENTRILOQUIST.—It is claimed by many persons that there is no such thing as what we call ventriloquism. They say that persons expect to hear a voice from some other direction than that in which the ventriloquist is situated, and, expecting it, think they hear it. The general opinion seems to be that ventriloquism is to the ear what sleight-of-hand is to the eye. Perhaps the most conclusive argument on the point is, that while people can be deceived, animals can not. A man will think the sound of a whistle comes from a distance; a dog will go to the party who whistles. To learn the art, it is, first of all, necessary to practice articulation without using the muscles. Many persons can do this easily; others can never learn it. After this is acquired, practice with the voice, throwing it, as it is called, to certain parts of the room.

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